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A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

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By
J. D. M. RORKE

New Edition
Revised and Enlarged

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TO

S. N. C.

PREFACE
TO FIRST EDITION

IT is some few years since I had the pleasure of beginning a correspondence-acquaintance with the writer of this book, who has asked that occasional fragments from my letters might be resuscitated in his own pages: I have not edited them in any way, and they should be taken as mere *currente calamo* observations, that I might perhaps now be inclined in some respects slightly to qualify. Not that I wish to repudiate my signature, but Mr. Rorke is, I am sure, the last person to wish to pin any one down with undue tightness.

I have read *A Musical Pilgrim's Progress*, usually with cordial agreement, occasionally with slight dissent, and always with genuinely keen interest; it seems to me a new sort of book, full of artistic insight arrestingly expressed. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Rorke has broken fresh ground: not only fresh, but also fruitful. The psychological development of the amateur (*amator*, the lover-as-such) set down, as in these pages, in candour and without convention, by one who can transform his musical enthusiasms into articulate literature—here is surely matter both of moment and of attractiveness to all for whom music is more than the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.

Mr. Rorke addresses a modest challenge to other music-lovers to follow in his steps, and as he has asked me to write a preface to his book, I am perhaps bound to accept the challenge, though with a full and lively realization of the fact that my evolution has been nothing like so respectable as his. *Horresco referens*, indeed; but I suppose I must obey.

Peering into the mists that have gathered during the course of nearly half a century, I seem to discern, as the first objects of my whole-hearted musical affections, two grisly phantoms known respectively as a *Marche des troubadours* by Henri Roubier and a *Gondellied* by Theodor Oesten: I have not been afflicted with a closer sight of either for years, but I have a vague impression, possibly unfounded, that the latter was slightly the less discreditable acquaintance, and a more definite impression that I loved the former rather the more ardently. No doubt I was a very small boy, but that is no comfort to me: I have known hosts of children of the same age who would scorn such low tastes. And the painful visions by no means cease there. I seem to remember, a little later, playing Beethoven's F sharp major Sonata and Thalberg's 'Home, Sweet Home' at one and the same concert (how appallingly I must have maltreated the former of this unholily yoked pair), and—quite certainly, I fear—wallowing in a new song about an Old Brigade (by one Odoardo Barri, if I recollect rightly) with extreme intensity of pleasure—I made a special point for a while of hearing the wretched thing whenever I could. And then came years during which I had, with queer indiscrimination, simultaneous enthusiasms for respectable and quite disrespectable things. I had what I know now to have been the inestimable advantage of steeping myself in the daily orchestral concerts at the Crystal Palace in August Manns's prime; but I must sorrowfully confess that an effusion called a Turkish Patrol, by one Michaelis—these details must have been deeply rooted to have stuck so vividly in my mind—that I often heard from the military band in the centre transept, gave me, for some time, at least as keen delight as anything I heard in the more select part of the Palace.

Later, in my undergraduate days, I kept a more or less regular musical diary: most of its entries read fairly decently, but I know very well, though I never committed the fact to paper till now, that for a quite considerable while some of my crowning emotional ecstasies were infallibly evoked by Stainer's Sevenfold Amen. Mr. Rorke began with Chopin without any of these horrible strayings; but having now abased myself in the dust, let me try if I cannot get a little more even with him in recalling the more creditable features of my evolution.

There is an ancient Oxford story of an undergraduate who, being requested to specify the minor prophets, replied that it was not for him to make invidious distinctions among holy men; and similarly, in naming the great names, I am as far as Mr. Rorke is from any desire to draw up judicial class-lists. Roughly chronological landmarks, so far as I can recall them, were the fourteenth of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, Beethoven's C sharp minor Sonata and, very markedly but later, *Leonora No. 3* (I invariably choked at the climax of the coda), Chopin's G major Nocturne, the *Warum* of Schumann (a very powerful long-sustained influence), Schubert's C major Symphony, the *Lohengrin* Prelude, the *Les Préludes* symphonic poem of Liszt (a merely meteoric force), and the *Liebestreu* and *Von ewiger Liebe* of Brahms, who appeared suddenly with a vehement attack. Of Bach I knew little, and that did not appeal much: at Mozart I rather sniffed. *Horresco referens*, again. It seems, perhaps, a queer hotch-potch of positives and negatives; but somehow I fancy I see a thread running through it all, a thread that, after many more twistings and turnings, I still hold in my hand unbroken. But I doubt if I should have thought of it in this way at all if Mr. Rorke had not made me.

Change is, I suppose, the law of music as well as of life; and we have to prove all things (and there are certainly plenty of them) before we can quite know how to hold fast that which is good. I whole-heartedly agree with Mr. Rorke about the greatness of *La Cathédrale engloutie*, but I recall as vividly as if it were a matter of yesterday my complete bewilderment when this new planet swam into my ken: there seemed to be nothing in my musical world with which to correlate it. But now it seems far more plain-sailing than some things which I have known twice as long. And so, when one's pupils bring compositions that appear at a first glance to read equally well upside down, one must not too hastily conclude that that is the last word to be said about them. Another generation is evolving in its turn; and, after all, it has escaped from the *Marche des troubadours*.

Which is, to the best of my conscientiousness, my outlined answer to Mr. Rorke's challenge; and I now leave the field to him.

ERNEST WALKER.

I want to thank Dr. Ernest Walker, who was very kind and helpful to me, a stranger, at the time when this book was first being made, and finished by writing the above preface for it; also Miss Marjorie Whyte, who has looked out all the music examples for the present edition.

J. D. M. RORKE.

July, 1933.

PART ONE

I

IF some one else had written it I should be intensely interested in a record of the sort this sets out to be. I mean a brief musical autobiography, describing from the beginning one's successive impressions and adventures, and discussing, not in the abstract, but on the basis of an actual individual experience, the nature of the appeal of different composers and different kinds of music. I meet musical people and hear them speak of far-off days when there was no name for them but Wagner, and see them at present subsisting on a diet of Mozart, that pure milk of the word, with, perhaps, large gobbets of modern stuff floating therein. Surely they have a tale to tell.

If any one wants to see music in perspective and get its stars orientated he must read the history of music. The history of music tells you who came after whom, and what developments he made in the sonata or in harmony or in orchestration; which it is indeed profitable to know. But I don't see why the relative position of the composers should be discussed only round their significance for form and the progress of form. There must be some unifying principle, but why should that not be the register of their impression on a single personality? More to the point than the history of musical form would be the history of a musical man. In that sort Bach might come after Debussy and quite a different order of truths be brought out, not indisputable, I admit, but only the least important truths are that. If it were done as seriously and systematically as the standard sort of treatise, we might find that the real

values of music are not, after all, so hopelessly incommunicable and incommensurable. They slip through the fingers in any analysis of the thing itself, but in the reactions of a human spirit to it fractions of them are caught and fixed; and in such data, if anywhere, they must be studied.

No other art, as far as I know, can show the way to music in this method. Religion can. And, curiously enough, the penalties that such a method might expect to incur, a narrow circle of interest, namely, and a brief life, have not befallen the greater autobiographies of religion. The histories of souls have turned out to have a more general and more enduring contribution to make, even to theology, than the histories of religion and treatises thereon.

Some day one of our music historians will see how much more important it is to be illuminating on music by writing the history of himself than to be illuminating on himself by writing the history of music. The chief difficulty in the way of a classic *Pilgrim's Progress* in music may be to find one among the great ones able and willing to confess enough original sin. We don't want an author who shuddered in the cradle at Gounod, nor one whose pure spirit cannot bear to recall what he said at the knickerbocker age about Bach. Their pilgrimage wouldn't cover enough of the ground.

In the meantime, awaiting the appearance of the classic work, the chief value of the present piece of writing is that it represents, I believe, something like the potential pilgrimage of every man. My travelling has been, I can see now, by a well-beaten road, the main highway. Not that I was ever conscious of it at the time. The real pilgrim is always a pioneer, blazing his own trail, even if he goes down Oxford Street. Regarded as an explorer

and discoverer, I am of the type of those sea-wanderers in Mr. Chesterton's parable, who sighted an island, sent a boat ashore and planted the British ensign—on Brighton beach. Yet when I think of all those who have never started, and of all those who have stuck at some point on the road where I too stuck; and when I think of the undreamt-of possessions that are waiting to be possessed, then even I am moved to get up and announce that I have a song to sing-O, and a story that presses to be told, not because it is mine, but because it might be any one's.

For I have this qualification: that in music I am an outsider. 'The way to get inside music', said an authority once, 'is to compose.' Now I have sometimes got as far as the first line of a poem; a child's paint-box or a lump of plasticene does stir up a daubing or manipulative itch in me; but hardly even a babyish creative impulse is awakened by the shining key-board or a pile of fair, ruled manuscript paper. I can't by any stretch imagine myself composing a page of music. In the presence of some finished work I am as a man who accepts the fact of a meringue without an earthly notion of how such a mysterious and delightful object came into being. The attachment between music and myself is one-sided. How much I care for her is hardly worth protesting if it doesn't presently appear; but I do not speak her language as my own. Others follow word by word while I miserably lose the thread, and catch a statement for the first time after its tenth repetition. Others have the entrée and talk and listen easily, while the outsider, like a dumb animal, can only understand a little by caring a lot.

Yet, for the business in hand, I am not counting this a disqualification. Even for insiders there may be a certain interest, in such a case, in observing the lines along which

intimacy and appreciation proceed. What matters far more, there are those outside, both those altogether outside, and the great hosts, amateur and professional, for whom the accent is on performance, who potter about among such small stuff, or, at any rate, such isolated, disconnected scraps, and never get any forrarder in music, and never get a larger, more comprehensive sight of it. For most of them this book carries a 'how much more' argument; few of those likely to read it to the end are not qualified to say: 'How much more do these things belong to me!' So may they be the better stimulated to set off and enter into possession of them.

2

My start was as late as it well could be. I didn't discover music till I was grown-up. When you are so late there's not much difference between twenty and sixty. You can never be more than an outsider then. Childhood is the only time in which a language can be learned so that it is native to one; if anything, that is truer of Music than of Chinese. What a lot may be done by securing for a child at the earliest formative age a few touches of aural and rhythmic training.

It did not happen to me to come under any musical influences while I was growing up. My parents went on the theory that no child should be made to learn music who did not show a taste for it. Which sounds reasonable, but you must be sure the child is given a taste *of* it, and it takes a competent person to do that. Consider my data: Those dreary music-teaching drudges of a past generation. The thumping, winter and summer, by one's peers at school and at home of 'pieces' which more and more by reiteration seemed to belong to the very pit of the inane.

Some of them (albeit *Kinderscenen* and Beethoven sonatas) were so horridly stamped in on me that the guise in which I first knew them still seems proper to them. I actively hated them, which was, I believe, a primitive sign of musical grace. Biggest deterrent of all was the sight of boys called away from play to 'practise'—tragic figures; more tragic if they went willingly.

By the prevailing code, music was a despicable thing. Do you remember the point of view of Edward in *The Golden Age*? He has been watching his sister and the Vicarage girls setting out on one of their walks, with their heads close together, and 'chatter, chatter, chatter the whole blessed time', as he puts it. In a serious mood he is grappling with the problem of what on earth girls talk about. He says, 'They don't *know* anything; they can't *do* anything—except play the piano, and nobody would want to talk about *that*.' Which gives pretty accurately the attitude of the average boy of the world. It was certainly mine, and I think I kept it up longer than most. I was always adopting and upholding the standards of my society with a religious fervour and loyalty, and always finding myself in the end left high and dry by a mysterious change of values in relation to such matters as girls or swotting or dancing or music. Thus, towards the end of school-days, there were quite decent fellows, two in particular, who would prattle shamelessly to one another about the things they played and heard, while I was still stiffening my back against any deliquescent tendencies during anthems or solos in church.

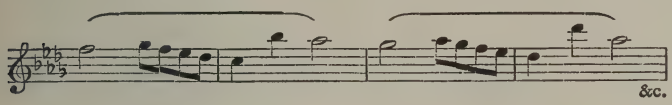
In all those unmusical, or rather anti-musical, days the single bit of music that did make a mark was one that seems to have a special power of getting through to the emotions of people not ordinarily susceptible to music—the Funeral

March from Chopin's B flat minor Sonata. There are some to whom all music but this is meaningless noise. William Archer somewhere confessed as much. There must be many others for whom it was the beginning of music. Here, for example, is a passage from an autobiographical fragment of Arthur Symons:

'. . . but another world was opened to me when I was about sixteen. I had been taught scales and exercises on the piano, I had tried to learn music, with very little success, when one day the head master of the school asked me to go into his drawing-room and copy out something for him. As I sat there copying, the music-master, a German, came in and sat down at the piano. He played something which I had never heard before, something which seemed to me the most wonderful thing I had ever heard. I tried to go on copying, but I did not know what I was writing down; I was caught into an ecstasy, the sound seemed to envelop me like a storm, and then to trickle through me like raindrops shaken from wet leaves, and then to wrap me again in a tempest which was like a tempest of grief. When he had finished, I said, "Will you play that over again?" As he played it again I began to distinguish it more clearly. . . . He told me it was Chopin's Funeral March. . . . I asked him if he would teach me music and teach me that piece. He promised to teach me that piece, and I learned it. I learned no more scales and exercises; I learned few more pieces; but in a little while I could read at sight; and when I was not reading a book I was reading a piece of music at the piano.'

In my own case, of the two hearings I remember best, one was in a church organ-loft, I having been conscripted with another boy to blow because the regular blower was drunk. We toiled in a rapture; felt as though we were doing it ourselves and worked the bellows *con gran espressione*. Collarless and in our shirt-sleeves we

were, and I can imagine the soulful scowl on our faces. The other hearing was from a military band in a railway terminus; people packed in thousands below; overhead the giant-spans of girders and glass, dispersing steam and clangy echoes. The music turned tigerish, came at one with rising snarls, and drew off growling. When the *cantabile* came it was almost unendurable! It was impossible to believe there could be higher heights of expressive song. Yes, it is strange (I am pulled up in this first step of my pilgrimage to reflect) how little final are the most certain certainties. Strange to be once again back there, and to realize from the standpoint of—



how flat and formal this would have seemed:

and then, lifted out of the past by the spaciousness and gloriousness of that last tune (from the heart of the *Eroica* Funeral March), to look again and see the other like a little doll, once inexplicably enthroned.

Apart from this one thing there is a very minimum of musical impressions to record. Some of the *Lieder ohne Worte* which a younger sister played at home pleased me, and occasionally I would have a command performance.

3

The Chopin exception turned out a prophetic one. That name was to grow great. University days began. I found myself with a pianist and a violinist for friends. Quite suddenly I began to listen a little to music. That may not seem a very extraordinary thing to do, but how many there are, even of fairly regular concert-goers, who don't do it—don't listen as they listen to the words of their neighbour's whisper. It might never have occurred to me to listen in this way. But often I was the only audience, and my friends, with the touching eagerness of amateur musicians, must collect even my impressions.

Every amateur violinist plays, or used to play once on a time, an arrangement of Chopin's E flat Nocturne. My friend was no exception. I shall never think unkindly of that *morceau célèbre* because it lifted up the gates for me. The Funeral March had remained unique, a thing apart; if it did cause to sprout any fibres of interest and attention they were directed towards other funeral marches. But the Nocturne indicated the composer as the vein to be followed up; there might be more of this sort of thing. Arrangements of other Nocturnes were procured. *There wasn't a dud among them.* We shan't inquire at the moment into the other things that were duds. An absolutely clear-cut line appeared. There was the rest of music, which might be pleasant, which might be very pleasant; and there was Chopin, which was serious. I bought a violin. I took lessons. They were not very orthodox. At the end of three weeks I was playing Nocturnes. And in the course of the next three years I amassed a monumentally complete and monumentally fatuous collection—of all Chopin arrangements for violin and piano that had ever been published.

Meantime Chopin was flowing in by other avenues. The Ballade in A flat was the first of the larger pieces I got to know. I lived in it chiefly for the excitement of the climactic preparation and statement, which made me want to yell. I had still to learn that in that kind Chopin had far grander things to show. I savoured a little the opening, mysterious, smiling, finger on lip, and, of course, the lilting episode for which Aubrey Beardsley made one of his nicest, cleanest drawings, of a lady on a horse, curvetting. But I had no idea that the subtle blend of chivalry and high spirits and glints of fun was peculiar to this Ballade and unique in Chopin's range. And when some one who once played it for me praised the last pages I was silent and astonished. That phantasmagoria, with its hurrying pace, and sliding of distorted themes obliquely across one's vision—I thought such a proceeding was probably in order at the end of a piece, but that anybody could *like* it, and even like it best of the lot, was beyond my comprehension as yet.

One after another the most universally played works came over the horizon: the B flat minor Scherzo, the G minor Ballade, the A flat Polonaise, the D flat and A flat Preludes (15 and 17), the Opus 35 Sonata, the F sharp Impromptu; these are some whose successive impacts in the early days I can vividly remember. 'Impact' is hardly the word, because the recognition was in no case sudden and immediate. I am not very bright now, but in those days I was unbelievably dull. I had no power at all of taking in even the clearest and strongest melody as it came; I had to know it all, by dint of much more repetition than the composer had provided in the work, before I began to feel it. So the first hearing, and perhaps one or two more, were only marking time. I held on in pure

faith at first, yet absolutely certain of what would happen. Presently, fragmentary bits would begin to stand out, as when you are developing a plate. They were nothing at all so far, but I knew from experience that later they would become high points of extreme delight. At last (and the few hearings might have spaced themselves over weeks or months) the occasion came when the work left one speechless or stammering. I can remember, for example, getting to know the A flat Prelude. It passed over my ears several times before a certain time came when I realized there was something going on in it. There was a big tune there. Bits of it and the general quality of it hung about me, haunting. The very next hearing was at a recital by Backhaus, and it came across altogether, pushed everything else aside and took possession of me. Then for days afterwards that steadfast and happy song would come welling up within, until I was ready to give gold to hear it again without. Naturally, any friend who played the piano would be cajoled into playing it. One, I remember, would only undertake it on condition that I sat alongside and hit the deep A flats that boom periodically through the latter part; but I was usually off the beat. I must have been a tiresome person for pianists to know. I never cared about the things they could play. I used them to get readings, if only spelt out, of the things I wanted to hear. But those were happy hours of stumbling exploration, and I got more from them than ever from finished performances. Even if one sportsman did come down hard on the wrong notes at a tremendous transitional chord, the way he shot both his fists up to heaven with an anguished 'Damn!' conveyed the composer's intention at least as eloquently as Paderewski could have done.

It is not easy to convey, or even oneself to believe in,

the state of mind of the Chopin period. The best way of obtaining a record like this would be to keep a musical diary and have it stolen and published by some one else, without emendations or deletions. As it happens, I have come across a contemporary document. Internal evidence places it about the year 3 (dating from the E flat Nocturne, as from the founding of Rome). I am sorry to say I have not the strength of mind to give it intact, even with apologies for its youthfulness. I am bound to confess that the worst passages, which I suppress, would have been the best evidentially; but I am not scientifically detached enough to be shameless, and I don't like to quote it mockingly.

'I would give up', the opening statement runs, 'all the poetry and all the pictures in the world for the music; and all the rest of the music for the Chopin; and all the rest of the Chopin for' (the piece of the moment happens to be) 'the *Berceuse*.' Knowing it, 'I wake up in the mornings happy without remembering why, like some one in love'. Then the document proceeds to bedeck it with the inevitable 'programme', a better one than usual this time, I having lit in Ibsen on those words of Brand to his wife: *Go and watch him while he sleeps. Sing him into bright dreams. A child's soul is as clear and placid as a tarn in the summer sunshine. A mother can hover over it like a bird, which, on its silent flight, mirrors her beauty in its deepest depths.* Which certainly is a lovely projection in words for Chopin's lovely idea of a cradle reverie. It is expanded in a description of the music, from which I take only the conclusion: 'At last the tranquil reverie is all gathered up in a climax of tenderness. There come two bars in which the happy dream seems to remember that it is not only a dream; it comes back from its soaring among beautiful

far-away things to the still more beautiful reality. How can I suggest the rapturous tenderness of those two bars? When I was a little boy I used to spend the summer in an old farmhouse. Swallows nested at the corner of my bedroom window. Sometimes, after I had been a great while in bed, and was still awake, although it was quite dark, there would be a stirring in the nest, and then—the heavenliest thing!—a low twitter; a sweet little gurgle of contentment. There was home and love and motherhood in it, and the delicious shiver of snuggling down. It would create such a rush of feeling as nearly burst my small soul. . . .'

This reveals a trick of brooding over isolated phrases that stuck in one's memory between the not very frequent hearings there would be of the *Berceuse*. Otherwise it is difficult to see how so much significance was read into the 'two bars' (which are those from the point marked *sostenuto*). It is just the point where, in most renderings, one would have the impression of touching solid, matter-of-fact ground again. On the other hand, the musical direction may have been inserted precisely to guard against the firming-up of the music being given a matter-of-fact colour, and the kind of interpretation suggested would be at worst something more than ample to keep a pianist on the right lines.

However, that is not important. It is to get first-hand evidence of the Chopin period that I have reproduced these fragments. The sort of response to his music that they reveal had a good deal of adolescent extravagance in it, and, no doubt, an element of auto-suggestion. But at any rate there was the substantial fact of a passionate, almost physical, thirst, which only Chopin's music could satisfy.

My sharpest sense of this had come when I spent six

months in the west of Canada, and, even among so many new interests and outlets, gradually became aware of a lack I had never felt before—a famine of music. One morning, in a remote ramshackle hotel, I heard outside my bedroom window a small clear whistling, in dead-true time and intonation. It is queer but true that this aubade included the best part of a Chopin Nocturne (the G minor of Opus 37). The whistler was a man painting the house, an Englishman, rather bleary and uninteresting. He played the piano; unfortunately there was no piano available. But what a thirst he gave me! With that thirst still on me I came home. I could no more get it satiated. For hours I would pore over the scores of Chopin's music, familiar and unfamiliar. Heaven knows what I made out of them; it's little enough I can appreciate through the eye even now.

If I had been wise I should have tackled the piano, late as it was; but it seemed too hopeless. A thirsty man is the last man to dig a well; he doesn't think of the years to come. I lived on musical friends. I frequented concerts, choosing them less for the performer than for the programme, that is to say, for the size and the contents of the Chopin group. Sometimes, if the object for the time being of my supreme desire was not on the list, a letter to the artist, backed by a small organized claque when the moment came for an encore, would lead to his playing it, not without a speculative glance round the hall for his anonymous and presumably fair correspondent. Pachmann usually gave whole recitals of Chopin. One didn't miss Pachmann if he came within fifty miles. I never resented his vagaries; I loved them. Funny enough they were, too, sometimes, and laughter and beauty, like laughter and terror, can interweave wonderfully well,

liberating the spirit for ecstasy. Once he sat on his third or fourth trial seat, two attendants standing by with further relays of chairs—sat dead-still, gazing along the level of the unopened piano, then rose, with eyes still intent, advanced stealthily and puffed away a speck of dust that had been flawing the polished horizon. Or I remember him getting up and coming forward before one work to say: 'I am now about to play the most deeficult piece of music in the world. Even Godowski—Godowski has said, "Eet *ees* deeficult".' I remember that now, though I haven't remembered it for many years, yet I can't put a name to the work. I can only guess that it may have been the Barcarolle.

Yet all these sources together—concerts, friends (in whom I ought to say I had become still more fortunate), and my own fiddling—gave me but driblets. I wanted a proper drink. There was one hope that began to take outline, a player-piano. I stayed in houses where they kept the wonderful beast, and I saw immediately that it was the first of all essentials, and that, if I had to live in a barn with no other furnishing, the barn should have in its driest corner a player. Was not every note of Chopin that had ever been published, including the whole 51 Mazurkas, including the songs, including every fragment that had been retrieved posthumously—was it not all cut on rolls, and waiting there in boxes, like canned meat—if one only had a tin-opener?

The first big taste came when I hired a cabinet-player for a month, with unlimited access to a music-roll library. In London, all through the hot August of the Coronation year, with the rest of my people at the seaside, I played Chopin from morning to night in my shirt sleeves, while men and newspapers were fussing about some procession.

I never had a more gorgeous and exciting holiday. When, at some tremendous climax, I crashed myself, stool and all, backwards on the floor, and only leapt to get into position again, I could have pitied the dull life of a cannibal chief or Chicago crook.

Very soon afterwards, in Liverpool, a player-piano became a permanent fixture, as far as the quarterly instalment plan allows of the attribute of finality. Then, with an eagerness which only towards the end slightly abated, I proceeded to get acquainted with the whole of Chopin's music. The player-piano makes possible these continental explorations of music, which are quite out of reach of the pedestrian pianist and only otherwise to be had through the ability to read scores soundlessly, like books. Every spare shilling in those days went to the laying-down of a Chopin stratum of music-rolls. It lies now beneath many super-imposed rows. What a history can be read in those successive layers, as in the geology of a cliff-face. And how unnecessarily thick some of the Eocene deposits now appear!

4

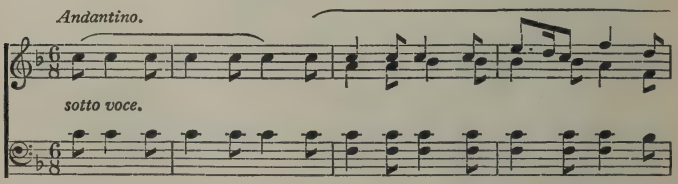
Before I come to the resultant in which this long period of Chopin-worship worked out, let me try to get inward to the reasons for it and the nature of it. It is an effort worth making, because what I have described as my own case is a very common one, perhaps usually in a less extreme form, but far more common than, I imagine, most experts realize. In a south-coast town I have sometimes gone down a street and heard Preludes or Studies or Nocturnes issuing from half a dozen different windows. I have mentioned the significant fact that Chopin's music

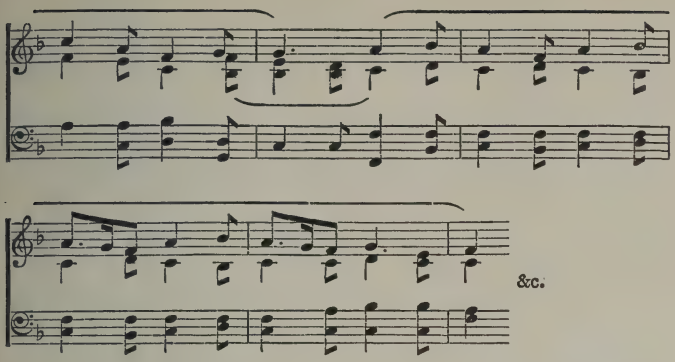
has been cut complete by the music-roll companies—he being the only composer, I believe, so distinguished.

We have to reckon with Chopin, first as the great awakener, and then as the great detainer. He is arresting in both senses of the word, he arrests attention and he arrests progress. Mr. Wells makes a character try to express this distinction between two women—that the first had blotted out for him all other women, while the second had seemed to gather up and represent womanhood. The Chopin passion resembles the former of these cases. His art captures for music people who would never otherwise have been susceptible to it; but in the process it eclipses the rest of music rather than illuminates it.

Suppose you wanted to awaken the attention of a musically deaf person, what fragment of music would you resort to most hopefully? I should try the second subject of the G major Nocturne:

There is a pretty story of small children stopping in their play to listen to the opening of the F major Ballade:





I hope it was that; one would like to believe it was that.

It is not hard to understand why Chopin should be thus the great awakener. First, because for sheer beauty of pianistic sound no one is his equal. The supply of it is sometimes amazing. The ravishing effects that come and are gone in other music, in Chopin stay until we can no longer hold our breath. What we would thankfully count in moments, Chopin serves in minutes. The small boy dreams of getting his fill of ice-cream—better, I remember once sharing a coco-nut with two or three other youngsters. An egg-cupful of the milk yielded us each a sip of what seemed celestial liquor. 'And there are islands', we meditated, 'where you could fill a tumbler, a jug, a bucket, with that stuff and be able to drink it for a long time without stopping!' It is just such miraculous draughts that one actually gets in Chopin; delicious sound that goes on and on, and at every change, when you would think, 'Now it is over', only enriches. For example, the Opus 10, No. 10 Study; or, in a nobler kind, the *lento* of the Fantaisie.

Associate with this the perfect lucidity of Chopin. You always know what he 's after. Every note has some meaning,

and a quite obvious one. Everything that could possibly heighten the beauty or the dramatic effect is included; everything else is cut away. The more intellectual structure must use notes as pawns in the great scheme, and often they seem to come very cheap. Chopin never uses a note which he hasn't loved and blessed; and all his labour upon his material is to the end of making it more perfectly transparent. He can afford to do it. He has that to offer which he wants us to see. The task is to clear away every veil, not to enhance by half-concealing. The melodies which he will adoringly bedeck he first lifts up naked into the light, as in the Berceuse. He is not like the lady who, according to Barrie, said her husband looked nice with a rug over him.

After beauty take expressiveness. For his material he skimmed off the song-stuff of life—love-songs, war-songs, sorrow-songs—brooded over it, as bees cluster and brood, till the creative temperature came and he could distil out his potent, intoxicating music. Music in those days meant for me a thrill, and it was Chopin who was full of thrills as he wrote and who had laid himself out to get them across. *Un esprit écorché vif*, a Frenchman called him, trying to describe that sensitivity which quivered at every stimulus. The thrill need not be one of sound and fury, though it was a rare piece of a hundred bars that did not come to that at some point; every *sotto voce* was passionate too. Even when he turned from the roses and raptures and lilies and languors to fresh, out-of-door things, or when he took on, as he so exquisitely could, the heart and vision of a little child, it was in a way to choke one. Simplicity was passionately simple. When the music was white it was white-hot. Think of the opening sections of the F major Ballade and the E major Study, or the *lento*

of the B minor Scherzo, or, less intense, the *semplice* of the Andante Spianato. He was always seeking to exploit to the last vibration the possibilities of an idea or a situation; he was straining at each moment after the most dramatic presentation possible. Other great composers can let down the tension for long stretches, or never screw it up very high. Chopin cannot bear to be boring; however large the canvas, he must work up every square inch of it. He exploits to the uttermost farthing at each and every moment the musical and emotional values.

There was an analogy, at any rate in my own experience, between Chopin and Kipling. Kipling has a unique gift for extracting that mysterious essence, 'copy', out of any bit of human character or activity. He can suggest that there is something quite indescribably tremendous about a man's seamanship, or his Englishness, or his knowledge of statistics, or his religion, and one temporarily accepts the suggestion for the sake of some vague thrill it gives, and because it would seem to be almost impious to question it. And just as there was a time in my school-days when, with all the will in the world, I failed to see that any one had written, was writing, or could write better stuff than Kipling, so there was this long time when Chopin seemed to me far and away beyond every other composer because he had gone to the limits of expressiveness, got the last thrill out of each moment.

The analogy went deeper, though it is a little premature to say so. Kipling later became 'whalebone', a private classification that needs explaining. Once on a time I joined with another twelve-year-old in making a spring pistol. When it came to the spring the other fellow suddenly and enthusiastically suggested whalebone (from somebody's stays). I demurred on the ground that it

wouldn't be up to the work. He said: 'Whalebone's the springiest stuff in the world.' 'Yes, of course, but it's not strong enough.' 'Not strong! My hat, there isn't anything anywhere as strong as what whalebone is.' I never forgot the sensation of being caught at that moment in a hopeless jam. I was up against one of those schoolboy dogmas (though invented on the spot) which it would be blasphemy to question; I even took it to my own bosom as a bit of satisfying and exciting lore. But of course I knew the stuff was no blessed good really. We should have to fall back presently on a bit of steel or springy brass. The transcendent virtue of whalebone was one of those noble truths which just wouldn't work in this base world. The other fellow should have recognized this too, and not invoked it when we were doing a job of work. So whalebone became a symbol in my young mind, often called up in judgements which I could not otherwise explain even to myself. In one department Kipling was a wonderful purveyor of it, and it was in its proper place there, in the world of fiction, while as yet I had no acquaintance with novels whose strength and truth were like common steel. And then, later, in the new world of music, it delighted and excited me, unquestioned, until I began to make discoveries in this world too which put music on a far more serious footing, challenging and to be challenged in the very way that showed up 'whalebone'.

This is anticipating; it is the strength of the Chopin spell I would be speaking of, not yet its limitations. And on this aspect of expressiveness, let me mention two more points. First, as to artistic sincerity, this can be said, as far as it goes, that Chopin is always his own most-moved audience; I do not believe he would have written differently had he written for himself alone. There is no thrill in his

music that has not made his own nerves tingle. Is there not a story, told, I think, of that section of the A flat Polonaise with the *crescendo* octave figure in the bass, that, playing it alone, he worked it and himself up to such a pitch of terror that he bolted from the room. Probably it is a lie, but it stands for a truth. He was a singer who did 'lean his breast up-til a thorn before he gan mourn'.

The other point is that his passionate imaginings were not allowed to run wild; they were held in control. His extreme sensitivity was yoked with an excellent taste, a fine feeling for style. (If his mother was Polish, his father was French.) It is rarely that any one who sets out in sympathy with him will have a revulsion and turn back because he goes over the line. The direction of the morbid is the one direction in which he cannot be quite trusted; one may detect a craving to probe sensibility, a finding of intolerable sweetness in intolerable pain. Here, for example, is one description: 'Chopin's music screams under its breath, like a patient they are operating upon in the hospital. There are flowers on the pillow, great sickly pungent flowers, and he draws in their perfume with the same breath that is jarred down below by the scraping sound of the little saw.'[1] On the other hand, we have, in the first place, to allow for the fact that Byronism was one of the affectations of his circle and time. And secondly, I think we ought to consider whether this morbid vein is anything like as pervasive and characteristic as received opinion pretends. Really, if you take away the Nocturnes (which, by their title, *s'accusent et s'excusent*) and that trio in the Funeral March (which is allowed to weigh too much), I don't think any one could say that morbid grieving or even gloom is very noticeable in Chopin.

[1] Arthur Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, 'Christian Trevalga'.

The last factor in this brief reckoning of Chopin's power to capture and enthral is his musical technique. I have not the knowledge to speak of more than those features of it that are obvious to any one, but they are such as help to explain why his music appeals so strongly to unsophisticated ears. Tunes, the plain man is always crying out for. Here they abound, sometimes in such profuse succession that Chopin seems to be emptying the sack—a month's rations for a single meal; e.g. the first movement of the Opus 58 Sonata. Given the tune, what to do with it? Not to dissect it. Not to pass it through the metamorphoses of such variations as Beethoven's and Brahms's. Just to go on singing it for a bit, embellished, but only so as to emphasize and enhance its identity. If it does undergo transformation it will be in stature, not in shape. It may re-enter *fortissimo*, on the crest of a straining, panting preparation, and what endeared itself with its gentle little love-ways (e.g. E flat theme in the G minor Ballade) lets loose the thunder of its power.

Nothing is allowed to be tiring; new material is continually forthcoming in a succession psychologically satisfying by its gradualness or its surprises, its kinships or its contrasts. Yet primarily every part is there for its own sake. If it did not justify its presence by its own beauty or power or point it would not hold its place. There are no dull stretches. This means that Chopin has not in view an ultimate, cumulative effect to which he is prepared to subordinate the present. He does not work for that high organic unity in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts and in which certain parts may take on a glory that could not be found in themselves alone. He wrote little in sonata form. He preferred the freedom (sometimes claiming it in titles like 'Fantaisie' or 'Impromptu') to

work for immediate effect, to select, shape, polish each fragment as an end in itself. What Chopin loses by this is just what the outsider is least likely to miss; and on the other hand, there, plain to see, he finds, moment by moment, more beauty and significance in Chopin than in Beethoven. Nor is the effect of the whole entirely sacrificed. When the final chord is struck he can look back over the work as he might recall in the evening a wonderful day. He has walked by still waters and in green pastures; he has burned with love and longing; he has struggled and fought, dallied in lotus-eater isles, galloped through the wild dark; in a place of prayer he has had moments of mystic vision; he has wept, he has dreamed, he has triumphed, he has feared. He has been through at any rate some of those experiences, and each of them superlative in its kind, the flowers the fairest, the tears the bitterest, the prayers the solemnest, the love the blindest, the wrath the fiercest that can be conceived. Though the music has lived only in the moment and sought no higher unity, yet the work has at least the quality of narrative—narrative of incident and adventure, in which anything may happen except a dull page, as against the self-determined and inevitable course of a narrative of character. To many a beginner, indeed, it has the quality of narrative as against the quality of preaching; the Scherzo or Ballade is like a splendid story; the typical sonata movement more like a sermon, with much expatiation on heads and sub-heads of the text.

The absence as a rule of organic development explains, I should think, the frequency of climax in Chopin. Failing other unity, there is a special need for setting up dominating points to hold things together, to create the feeling that the music is going somewhere or has been

somewhere. Certainly there is hardly a piece more than a page or two long without its climax, and usually of the most direct, full-front *ff* kind. Nowhere is Chopin so inventive as in his effort to heighten the preparation for the climax and to underline the climactic statement itself. In the middle section of the C minor Nocturne we can feel that he is dying to suggest a crashing of the notes altogether beyond what can be associated with human hands and an ivory keyboard—the chromatic runs up to the chords are so obviously the whizz of a titanic sledge-hammer through the air. The most exciting, and quite the most original climax of them all, the one at the end of the F major Ballade, is referred to later in this book.

Over against Chopin's rejection of the restraints of form stands a contradictory-looking fact. If we gather that he was unwilling to compromise in any way his freedom to create, we may remember with a start that of all composers, he loved to work sometimes fettered by an imposed condition. Witness many of his Studies, the twenty-four Preludes (written in the twenty-four keys), what might be called 'pattern' tunes (e.g. No. 12 Prelude), and the many cases where an accompaniment figure is kept going with a persistence that tells us he is on his honour not to change it. The condition may be part of the artistic scheme, as in the Berceuse, with its unvarying bar in the bass. Conversely, it may be as far from an artistic consideration as an offer to have one hand tied behind his back, e.g. the Black-key Study. Pretty often we are conscious of at least a sporting element in the composer's essay and our enjoyment of it. And yet the resulting creations are not mere *tours de force*. Nobody has ever written technical studies on the level of Chopin's greatest. It is understandable that his ingenuity should be stimulated and that he should give us pleasure of that

rather specialized sort we get from fine examples of verse-forms like the Triolet, Ballade, Chant Royal, &c., pleasure in which one concomitant is a marvelling at the gracious and lifelike animation of a very rigid mould. But it seems almost miraculous that some of the most poetical, even mightiest (Opus 25, No. 12 Study) of Chopin's shorter works were thus brought to the birth.

Once this liking of his for working to an arbitrary shape has been recognized in the special demonstrations of it, it becomes visible running through all his work. Chopin, with all his impromptus and fantasias, is seen as a born formalist, if we look for local geometrical patterns, not large organic ones, sound-forms, not thought-forms, which, of course, is the kind of formation that helps the music to be immediately intelligible and effective.

5

Now obviously there is another side to all this. It is a bit of sheer good luck for the musical pilgrim that he should enter at once into a region of such vivid beauties and excitements; but how is he ever going to tear himself away from it? He turns a dreary eye on those who speak of loftier heights and more sublime beauty; he lends an unbelieving ear when they insist on illustration. He has tried, and thinks he knows. Other music will either have a touch of the Chopin quality; in which case, good, but why not the pure fountain itself? Or it will be different from Chopin, and every respect in which it differs will be a falling short of the most satisfying and most thrilling appeal possible. Chopin on his own ground cannot be surpassed, and before one can reach another standing-place one must travel by a road that seems dull and unpromising from the existing view-point. It would even

be mournful to think, if it were not totally incredible, that one could possibly come to prefer the close, industrious development of some short first subject in a sonata movement, or the busy maze of a fugue, or any sort of equable, central-heated music to the fire and ice of Chopin.

So we have to reckon with Chopin as the great detainer. After a certain point he does not open up the pilgrim's path but rather stands across it. In such a case I do not think there is any way round. There is something futile about attempts to foster 'appreciation' or force it away from the line of its own strongest inclination. The huntsman whips his hounds off the line they want to hunt, with a superior knowledge of where he can show them sport. But it is dangerous, even with superior knowledge, to treat the musical scent so. Personally, I hold to a general belief that if a man is one-sided what he needs is not to be drawn back from his subject, but to get farther into it. I should say, let the seeker find his way by what he loves best. If he is chivied off that line by well-meant tutoring, or if he distrusts it or deserts it through artistic snobbery or earnest efforts at self-improvement, he loses his only clue and wanders about in music like a gaping tourist and has no touchstone for its values. The Chopin passion, however limited, is genuine. Think of men and women, all whose reverence for art has been second-hand, who have yet come to discover a music for which they positively grow hungry, and which is satisfying like things to eat. So far from the feigned interest that is a duty of politeness, their feeling when some hand touches out a few premonitory phrases is nearer to the frank gusto of low life, or nursery life, that greets the approaching dish with a brisk aeration of the saliva. In all the atmosphere of make-believe and perfunctory worship in which music,

even more than the other arts, has to live, here is, at any rate, genuineness. The pilgrim must not be dragged on, supposing any force or authority could do it, at the risk of leaving his heart behind. Let him stick to his country till it begins to be too small for him, and refuse to leave it except for a better country, which he himself seeks.

Incredible as it may seem, that time will come. It did for me. One works through Chopin. The very lucidity of his music has this reverse side, that one exhausts its possibilities. It is so direct and clear in its appeal, the intention can be so completely grasped, that, one might say, you come to see all round it. Gissing says of certain passages in *The Tempest*: '. . . their virtue can never be so entirely savoured as to leave no pungency of gusto for the next approach.' That is exactly what one cannot say of Chopin's music; it can be savoured to the last note.

The emotional content burns itself out. In my experience this happened again and again to individual works. The same music might renew its thrills a hundred times, but not a thousand times. Most of the Nocturnes, for example, my first loves, went dead. The B flat minor Scherzo was another specially conspicuous case. Once a volcano, it became quite extinct. The same lava streams were there, fixed in the shape of their pouring incandescence, but now cold and frozen. Meantime, of course, other pieces were in full eruption, but, with a few exceptions to be mentioned later, some degree of the same fate awaited them. One works through Chopin, incredible as it would once have seemed, and yet has not finished with music.

It does not now seem a strange and difficult truth that there can be better and greater music than Chopin's, but I remember so well what I used to feel that I am moved to make a determined attempt at an explanation to my old

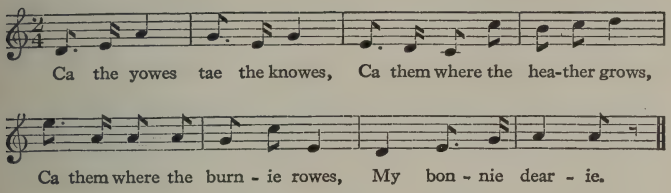
self and to any other wanderers enthralled and palely loitering. There surely is a call for one. Nothing I came across in the old days, or since, for that matter, threw any real light on the curious failure of the musical people I met or read to remember Chopin when there was talk of the greatest ones in the art. It might, once and again, be an oversight, but it came to look like a conspiracy. Or were these pundits just poor fish, incapable of responding to poetry and passion? In any case it was enraging. Here was even Schumann given reverent and affectionate consideration, and never a word of Chopin. And nobody explained or apologized. What did he lack? Admittedly he was not a mighty man with sonata-form or the orchestra, but who is going to maintain that these facts invalidate his art? What do you want in music? Beauty and expressiveness? Does he fall short there? Who puts him in the shade? Cannot his utterances on occasion surprise anew one who knows his every note?

Here is a task for criticism. Perhaps a test for the autobiographical method—for the claim advanced for it that it may be able to get hold of some of the real values of music which slip through the fingers in any analysis of the thing in itself. This particular record passes through the heart of the problem and the story as a whole ought to contain the data.

Over and above the record itself, I can attempt now, at this later time, a diagnosis which might possibly have carried some enlightenment to my earlier self, though I doubt it.

Once, in a review, I read: 'Does this poem represent any more than a sensuous moment?' That pulled me up. I was not aware that I ever asked more of a lyric than that it should represent a sensuous moment. But I found that

I did. Take, in the joint world of music and verse, a song, say this one:



There is a sweet earth-free thing, the tune itself and the words Burns wrote to it, as minutely and carelessly perfect as a flower; something born of human life that makes human life lovely for God or any one to look at.

It is earth-free, and yet, you know, it is born out of the earth, out of a particular earth. Behind it is a substantial background of character and culture, with Presbyterian kirks and village dominies and all sorts of uncouth objects dug into it. It is a flower of the field, but it could not have come into being without the field. You may not be in the least sensible of this, but you will be as soon as you compare it, a Scots Lowland song, with some of the tunes of the Highlands and Islands, whose beauty has a sub-human quality, not far from that of sea-birds' cries, or the curlew's rush of whistling.

Now take this idea, which I will not further define because there is rather more in the particular example than can be got into general terms, and apply it to 'composed' music. I could find in Beethoven, as it happens, an instance which carries almost exactly the significance I have tried to bring out about the folk-tune just quoted. It occurs in the *Adagio molto e mesto* of the first Rasoumowsky Quartet (Opus 59, No. 1), a movement quite exceptionally deep, for that period of Beethoven's life, in its quiet

workings and imaginings. As it goes on its way, entirely indifferent to surface effect, there comes, eagerly awaited, swiftly gone, and never heard again, this lovely little snatch of song:

As though its creator, while he walked broodingly, had plucked a wisp of stuff, shaped it lightly into so sweet a flower, and let it fall. Beauty is born thus easily in such a field, like a poppy in the corn. Again, I happened to mention Schumann. The peculiar value of what we cull in his music is just exactly that it is rooty of the soil in which it grew.

But Chopin's are not flowers of the field. There is no field they belong to. In a certain novel a man, Jones, is described as 'having no aura'. What we begin to realize about Chopin's music is that its aura has no body. We may cross-examine the music, or cross-examine ourself enjoying it, and fail again and again to spot the deficiency. But there is that one fatal question: 'Does this music represent more than a sensuous moment?' On that, a silence. We find we cannot answer 'Yes'.

Let us turn for a moment to look objectively at the facts about this music and its maker. I should say that Chopin's music expresses his fantasy-life. Perhaps every composer's does to some extent. But Chopin's exhibits that sort of compensation-fantasy which drives shop-girls to novelettes about young lords and duchesses, and rule-ridden school-

boys to tales of pirates and crooks. His musical self is rather strikingly the obverse of his actual self. His life, though short, was the opposite of tragic or passionate or heroic. There was no poverty, except a little stringency towards the end; no loneliness; no great strivings; no great sorrow; no great love-story; it is true there was a disappointment which some biographers have tried to work up into a grand passion and a broken heart, but his letters of the period make it clear that he was not badly wounded. As for his fighting ardour, there is the oft-told incident of his vacillation at Vienna when his country's call came and his comrade started post-haste for Poland. We do not, of course, expect the singer of songs to be eminent in action, but here we are dealing in direct opposites at each salient point of character and experience. Those Nocturnes, with their pervading colour of melancholy and bursts of wild despair, were written by a youth whose outward life was an almost unbroken run of prosperity and success, and whose inward disposition was a happy one, with a healthy sense of fun. Those strains of a love mightier than death, that deep intimate longing of the Barcarolle breaking into a song of ecstasy, came from one who, after his boyish flames, knew nothing beyond mild drawing-room flirtations and a rather mysterious, but certainly not very passionate affection for George Sand. The fire and fury of the 'Revolutionary' Study, the deliriously exultant warrior-chant of the Fantaisie, were the utterance of a charming fellow, as mild and inoffensive as a curate.

Looking at the facts objectively one gets thus far with some assurance. Chopin's music represents, far more than that of most composers, his fantasy-life. And not, as, for example, Wagner's, a fantasy that was an expansion of character and experience, with himself at the centre of it,

but another world, or rather many other little worlds, as lovely and shiny as soap-bubbles, and as empty and evanescent. But where's the harm in that? The devotee might feel a little uncomfortable when it was pointed out, but, if he demanded where and in what way the music suffered, it would be hard to answer.

The music itself is not facile, careless stuff; on the contrary it has been wrought out at immense pains with concentrated purpose and severe discipline. The music is not less graphic because the composer has dreamed, not lived, his adventures; on the contrary it is more vividly expressive than would be the utterance of some one crucified by grief or red-handed from the foray or pale with love.

Even this clue does not enable one to find a cardinal weakness by analysis of the music and the man. But it is a fact which does interlock with the hearer's inner experience. Music will sink in only to the level from which it came. What was born of a sensuous moment begets one. The world of fantasy has hues which glow and melt and shift like the iridescence of an oil-film, and, like it, catch and fix the gaze of even a dull eye. There are no colours of all the range which cannot show there, gleaming purer and brighter than those that clothe a stable core of substance. But it is not enough. With all its beauties and thrills it cannot stand beside an art that grows out of the solid. It is not enough to be a spirit hyper-sensitive to every breath that blows. We miss, first of all in ourselves, and then in the composer who communes with us, the sense of a weight behind the action, a centre of character and thought at grips with life or at home in it; some correspondence in the individual to what is racially behind a flower of song like 'Ca the yowes tae the knowes'. And so we come to understand how Chopin's name is apt to be

clean forgotten and passed over when there is talk of the great ones of the art. We ourselves, perhaps, once so puzzled and indignant, become oblivious of it too, without a second thought, unless we happen to look back over the way by which we have come.

This would be my attempt to let in some light on a problem utterly baffling to many who can't speak, and almost completely ignored by those who can. Of anything I have ever read bearing on it, I think this passage is most to the point:

'Like all other young men he was absorbed, entranced, with the *works*. Their power over young people is remarkable, but not more remarkable than the fact that they almost invariably lose this power over the individual, while they have as yet retained it over the race; for of all the multitude who do homage at the shrine . . . few linger long, and fewer still, after the turmoil of life has yielded room for thought, renew their homage. Most of those who make the attempt are surprised—some of them troubled—at the discovery that the shrine can work miracles no more. The *Chopin*-fever . . . has its origin, perhaps, in the fact that the *composer* makes no demand either on the intellect or the conscience, but confines himself to friendly intercourse with those passions whose birth long precedes that of choice in their objects—whence a wealth of emotion is squandered.'

Only this does not happen to have been written about Chopin at all. It is George MacDonald talking to a previous generation about Byron. But Byron, at this date, no longer retains his power over the race, and what is here said happens to be so true of the emotional side of Chopin's appeal, that, with a mere changing of the words italicized, it can be profitably re-addressed.

When Chopin has been sized up is he disposed of,

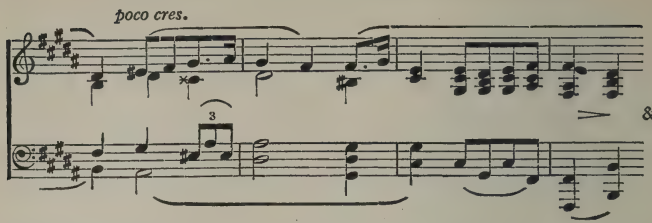
finished with? Not, of course, for the musician, who has had him in calm and correct perspective from the first, or for most of a lifetime. But the outsider, in the ardour of his pilgrimage, does, I think, leave him behind. As a pioneer his whole interest is at the spear-head of his exploration and discovery. An enthusiasm outpassed is likely to be followed by undue reaction. It was so in my case.[1] There came a time when Chopin completely ceased to be played or sought.

Almost completely, rather. Because there emerged an exception—the F minor Ballade. A little earlier I had discovered how much more I cared for it than I knew. After a long absence in which there had been no music, I got back to my player. I was so sharp-set that I wondered on the journey what I should play first and thought greedily of this and that. But when at last I stood before the array of music-rolls, my hand went out to this Ballade, which had not crossed my mind. From that time it stood a little above the rest of Chopin, and remained in sight when the rest was submerged. I was under the impression that the judgement was heretical. But Dr. Ernest Walker wrote to me on the point: 'The F minor Ballade is undoubtedly the crown of Chopin's work.' I am glad that a process of natural selection operating over a number of years should leave an outsider like myself with the same surviving residue that so discerning a judgement also singles out. There is nothing about this work that conspicuously marks it off from the rest. It appears to be put together much after the usual plan. Almost every section could be closely paralleled in type from other writings of Chopin. It does not at particular points beat any records

[1] And still is, some readers may think. If so, it must stand as one of the facts in the case.

for beauty or expressiveness. It is less dramatic than usual. I could not have said why I cared for it so much. Now I should say it was because it has exactly that 'flower of the field' quality I have tried to expound. It is at once more free of its maker than his works normally are; is not under his thumb, lives its own life, and it has behind it at last some of the real stuff of himself.

Dr. Walker would further lift out of the ruck the Prelude Opus 45, the Barcarolle, and the Fantaisie. I would certainly class the first two of these as also things apart. The voice of the beautiful Prelude is strangely like the voice of Brahms. The Barcarolle might well have survived alongside the fourth Ballade, and ultimately that was its standing for me. But during the Chopin period itself I never, for some reason, properly got hold of it. Well, I suppose the reason was just its not conforming to type, coupled with the chance that I had never happened to give much attention to it. I think it was almost the only Chopin roll that I bought years later. The Fantaisie does not seem to me to have in the same way difference in kind. It stands out because it is at the top of the tree, the typical Chopin at his very best. Its chief subject is the most splendid of its heroic sort. Its slow middle-tune shares the claim to be Chopin's loveliest only with the *molto più lento* of the B minor Scherzo. There is one thing in the Fantaisie that always puzzles me—the little tune that comes



immediately after the introduction and is repeated so primly, once, twice, thrice in different keys. It was one of the rare places where I could not see what Chopin was after. Why on earth should he go off the high road (and have rather a scramble to get back to the key again) at the very outset and for so tiny and trivial an episode?

Apropos of these outstanding and chiefly rather late works, Dr. Walker added this remark: 'Like Mozart and Schubert—and, among older but still not old men, Beethoven himself—Chopin seems to have been going up the ladder hand over hand in his last years. Mendelssohn is perhaps the only example of a great composer who was at his greatest in quite early youth and declined afterwards.' Which starts one reflecting on what might have been. Where would he have got to, going up that ladder, had he lived? I suppose there must come for every composer a phase when he applies to his art 'that fatal knife, deep questioning'. He feels a little weary of the methods and idioms that have grown so slick to his hand in a lifetime's usage. He cannot go on indefinitely surpassing his achievements in that kind. What is going to happen then? He may decline towards mere craftsmanship, repeating himself with waning invention and skill. Or, like Beethoven, after the pattern of Ibsen's *Master-Builder*, he may begin to work on some greater plan in which there is no perfection nor attainable end. Or, short of that, his own

questioning, his own shaken confidence, his own need and longing may enter into what he creates, so that we begin to meet there new qualities, closer to us and closer to reality than the old splendid eloquence. In the last work, or somewhere among the late works, of a number of composers I think a swan-song of this kind can be found—some utterance which has in a special degree, the intimacy, humility, deep hunger and desire, which come in such a way—Brahms's *Ernste Gesänge*, for example; Schubert's posthumous Sonata in B flat; that last little melody of Schumann's to which Brahms wrote such noble elegiac variations.

It is very unlikely that Chopin's art, had he lived, would ever have suffered any remarkable transformation and enlargement; he had not the personal force and bigness to develop like one of mankind's Master Builders. But neither would he have slacked down into the mere craftsman, carrying on by inertia. I think he would have spoken still in more or less the language we know, but in simpler words, and for that reason harder to be understood and summed up; not so immediately to be adored, but never so completely to be done with and let go. The Opus 45 Prelude, the Barcarolle, and the F minor Ballade are there as tokens, especially the last.

PART TWO

I

THE reign of Chopin in my life did not run on to a natural end. Before that came to pass he was supplanted violently by Wagner. The catastrophic event was a hearing of *Tristan und Isolde* one night in Liverpool.

I had seen *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* once or twice. 'Seen' is the right word, because these encounters were rather in the line of 'going to the theatre' than of seeking musical experience. They have left hardly a memory. I suppose they were poor shows, the best that could be put up by the two repertory companies touring the provinces in those days. But I must have been amazingly impervious. Over and over again in this respect I am amazed. 'How could there have been a time', I demand of myself, 'when *that* sounded in my ears without waking me up?' The truth is that the untrained mind does not easily receive a simple impression and make a natural judgement. There is too much inertia to be overcome; there is not the ability to attend to the essential; a *prima donna* who waddles can shut the doors against, for example, the music of *Lohengrin*. It is a great fallacy to believe that an artless judgement will be, within its limits, trustworthy. All sorts of accidental circumstances influence it which the more sophisticated hearer is able to sift out. Instead of a simple receptiveness towards a new thing, the door is either barricaded or perhaps flung too wide and decorated with an arch of welcome.

The doors, anyhow, would have gone down before the glorious performance of *Tristan* that happened; but they

were partly open already. I went with some preliminary acquaintance with the music, just enough to be susceptible to its full attack. It was overwhelming. It set up such a swirl that for a day or two after I hardly seemed to be coming and going on solid ground.

That night drama took on an undreamt-of potency, fulfilling, perhaps, some of its original function. For the work, so much more than a spectacle, seemed to suck into its course the banked watchers and listeners, as a river drains the valley slope. It was *like* a river, from the first drops that a dark little hill-spring pulses over its brim, so infinitesimally, so fatefully, to flow and flow, softly, swiftly, madly, drearily, darkly, 'through caverns measureless to man', on to the exultant thunder of its full flood's leap to death in a sunless sea. I think *Tristan* justifies even Wagner's grandest theories of and claims for 'the art-work of the future'; it must stand high up among the mighty things of all time that have moved or shall move the human spirit.

I have heard *Tristan* often since then, but never again in quite the same way, and I don't know that I want to. I have an idea that it does not come off for any one more than once; and the big occasion does not wait till familiarity has made the music continuously interesting from beginning to end, but occurs while there are still long stretches of it unappreciated, which enter only subconsciously into one's impression. By the time these gaps have filled in one finds oneself listening at the great moments with the ears of long ago. One regards from the bank now, certainly with admiration, with awe; but only in remembrance is one borne on the breast of that current and tossed in that conflux of waters.

This is only to say that the greatest experiences in art

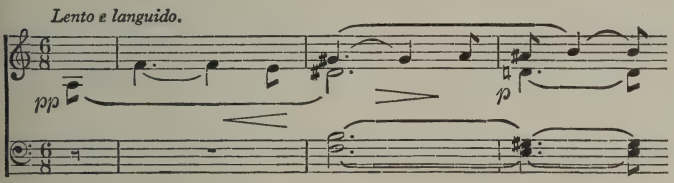
cannot be repeated, any more than life can be re-lived. It is not to imply that the music itself fades and wears thin. There are still those moments in the love-music of the second act when one has the conviction, as strong as ever, that no power on earth could hold up the flow of music and stop it dead, not a bomb through the roof, not a paralytic seizure of the conductor, not though the whole material framework of the universe dissolved. So strongly does the vital current of song set that somehow, somewhere it must press on.

There is still that revelation, as it seems to me, from near the tragic heart of all Wagner's music in the Prelude and opening of Act III, that heaviness that has yet within it the hot spark of life, stifling and impotent. And then, in such a created atmosphere, the shepherd's tune—a Shakespearean stroke of art.

There is still the final utterance, and always one has forgotten how mighty it is. When it arrives I am conscious of the composer. He seems to be openly girding his loins and saying, 'The time has come; I am going to make my great effort now.' That idea visits me without impairing in the least the state of exaltation. Deliberately and with formidable intention, Wagner gives out the central theme of it all, and has us in the hollow of his hand. It does not matter that we should be aware of the man strung to make this music, since it is the deep cry of his own being. And not only of his being but of all human being—the pressure of life against the oppression of the void, the assertion of love in the face of death. Oh, those sweeps of the harp! It is they which universalize the music round about Isolde so that it spreads out in a soft tragic extension. Then it is gathered in again, concentrated, sharpened to one terrible point of straining attack. Isolde herself floats in ecstasy,

following her lover as he had bidden her to the 'dark land of night'. But the music down in a real world strives on her behalf. The phrase of rising notes (first heard in the second two bars of the opening, quoted below), the phrase that stands for the pressure of life and love, is reiterated without progress or retreat until expectation is almost numb. It is like seeing a figure on tiptoe in an extreme and desperate fixity of straining, holding the attitude for an incredible length of time. There is a break and a falling away. But immediately the straining is renewed, and, with a superhuman effort, prevails. *Tristan* ends in a triumph which then rolls out softly far and wide, as if something had been won for the spirit of man.

I have left it last to speak of the opening, perhaps because it is only when one knows what is beginning that one feels its instantaneous grip—that first whisper out of the dark that freezes one to one's seat:



It is at the moment of opening that the composer has his chance, whatever he can make of it. It is then he is most a creator. There is silence, and, as God said, Let there be light, he says, Let there be sound. The conductor gathers his forces; the pianist holds his hands for a moment; there is stillness, wonder, expectancy; the ear of the listener is at its most sensitive, his mind a white sheet of paper. At that moment there is something of the miracle of birth, if it is only a little cool fugue subject that writes itself in

single notes. Never will soft chord sound so touching, nor harsh chord so devastating. How the abrupt announcement of the 'C minor' brings one's heart into one's mouth! How the fabric of the 'Ninth' comes looming out of the shimmery void! But in all music has that opportunity of the opening ever been so perfectly seized as by the first restless yearning phrases of *Tristan*? They are like the slow waking of some mortal on a strange planet. And strange enough world in truth it is, this elemental realm of love and death, for Mr. Smith and Miss Brown (who are having an evening at the theatre) and all the rest of us, in pit and stalls and gallery; and yet, really, a world which is theirs too, and ours. Because all of us are mysteries of spirit in the same setting of infinity. It is only a superficial view that sees incongruity between these little people and the mighty matter unfolded before them. We take one another at a trivial surface valuation; we hardly allow ourselves to remember that there is a life underneath for whose wonder and anguish and longing such utterance as this is not a bit too big, and for which and to which nothing else speaks at all, unless it is some old hymn like 'Rock of ages' in church. Mr. Wells very truly says in one of his novels:

'The streets are alive with people, grave decorous-looking people. They pass intent upon their various businesses with an air of knowing exactly what they are, and exactly what they are doing. And last night this self-possessed young woman bit her pillow and beat the air with clenched hands and cried, "O God, O God, shall I never escape?" and that grave and respectable gentleman with the gold-tipped cane stared out of his bedroom window at the dawn and wished and came near contriving another man dead.'

Mr. Smith and Miss Brown are not necessarily incon-

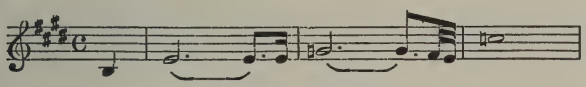
gruities in the theatre whose air is pulsing with the mighty music of *Tristan*.

2

The dawning might of Wagner brought indeed a twilight of the old gods.

> So — werf' ich den Brand
> In Walhallas prangende Burg,

—and Brynhilde's torch lit on the supremacy of Chopin, anyhow. That supremacy, no doubt, was in its decline and was bound to fall for the reasons I gave when discussing it as an isolated problem. But, as a matter of history, the Chopin-spell did not so much break up within; it was broken into from without. First his bigness was dwarfed. It could not be otherwise amid this new architecture of cloud-capped towers, gorgeous palaces, and solemn temples. His vividness paled among these burnished colours. His heroics shrivelled before the superbness and superbity of Siegfried's



His tales of passion were the romantic moonings of a boy beside these groanings of the spirit of man, or superman, and its ecstasies.

Of course, Chopin might afford to lose bigness; so much of his best is precious in its littleness. A single thread of bird-song can maintain itself among the glories of mountains and clouds; a single eagle-feather (to take Schumann's simile for some of the Preludes) is not paltry beside a battle-cruiser. Wagner's music might correspond in art to that Hebrew type in religion which sought its God in the power that ruleth Behemoth and planted the cedars

of Lebanon; and Chopin's art be the nearer to that finer insight which found God in the power that cared for the sparrow and clothed the flower of the field. There were Studies and Preludes, little bits of bright perfection, which nothing in Wagner could overwhelm or even challenge.

Yet here too an invisible sapping of foundations was at work. Even such exquisite things were hardly safe against the suspicion that they belonged to the drawing-room, that their art was of the order of a pretty picture or a 'happy thought'. That is putting it too strongly, and cheapening more than is fair or true what are among the treasures of music; but it may serve to indicate the line along which one's feeling about them could be modified, not because of anything that surpassed them in kind, but because the whole field of music was insensibly enlarged. The walls of the *salon* melted away, and one found oneself in a place that seemed more like the wide world of reality.

A musician might be quick to interpret the sense of music's larger place and hold as simply the transition from piano to orchestra. That certainly was a factor later on. But at first I was working largely with piano-transcriptions, and was never very sure that I could grasp and weigh the actual substance of the music until I had reduced it to that form. Really the transition was of a more important and essential kind. What was happening lay deeper in than the ear. Music was entering upon the second stage of its conquest, and taking under its sway new areas of thought and life.

Wagner sought for music a larger function than Chopin had exercised. One had to do with music which addressed itself to a greater part of one's consciousness than had been accustomed to respond to music. Even in the realm of feeling its function was wider, apart from the question of

whether or not it was more intense. This music came out of a bigger life—out of the heart of a prophet as well as a poet.

Further, it addressed itself to more than the feelings, to the mind. Naturally, you might say, since it was associated with action and with explicit thought. I think it would still make some such claim if it were wordless. In analysing old impressions it is not possible to make that separation. But one can go as far as this, that one had a sense of continuity in the music. It was impossible to hear single works or excerpts without thinking of the rest; each was like one loop of the long cable dragged up to the light. Even with a closer familiarity the sense does not disappear that Wagner's music hangs together more than that of any other composer; and the impression does not seem to come from mere mannerism or idiom or the occasional resemblances and cross-quotations but from some inherent continuity. It holds through the whole range of colour and expression. It is not broken even in those swift plunges in which Wagner delights, from hot voluptuous air into the cool purity of the forest or the springtime fields. So you may see in a decorator's samples some particular kind of paint, say, a lustrous paint, displayed in the whole gamut of colour, and retaining its peculiarity throughout.

This continuity gives to the music the character of a presentment of life. The world is being steadily viewed by a constant personality. If, then, we include in our survey the thought with which the music is bound up, and which is plainly before us in words, we realize that the continuity rests upon an intellectual basis; that we have to do not only with a presentation of life, but with a serious interpretation of it, a philosophy, a religion.

Wagner's music makes a wider claim on the human spirit

not only because as it comes to us it is allied with other modes of expression and explication, but because behind it, at its source, more of the whole man enters into the inspiration and shaping of it than is in motion in the composer of 'pure' music. For good or for evil the energy of an intelligent, purposeful reaction, seeking to interpret life and even to change life, has moulded it. The same thing might be true of very poor and dull didactic music. It can be urged that the beauty and strength of Wagner's music do not depend on such a consideration, but exist in spite of it. Yet, granted that the music does make its mark by its own beauty and strength, the intelligence and will that are associated with it certainly enter into its importance. It is no use the purists protesting; you cannot in practice isolate the musical values; what he would call irrelevant considerations were involved in the birth of the music, and cannot be entirely separated out in the listener's impression and response. The dilettante who comes under the sway of Wagner discovers that music is overflowing the place assigned to it in his scheme of things, is interpenetrating, influencing, or at least addressing itself to, his whole thought and outlook. Music is assuming a larger function.

So much may be said of the Wagner stage as we stand there and look backward from it. Turning now to look ahead something more must presently be said on one or two of these points.

3

If Wagner's world seemed to dwarf Chopin's the very nature of its largeness brings one all the more quickly to question in turn its finality.

One line of development that implies a criticism of

Wagner is represented by Debussy. Wagner caught and held one by a quality of strangeness in such phrases as those which open *Tristan*, giving to his art the wild naturalness of life. In Debussy we find it again, heightened, creating the atmosphere at once of mystery and realism. As to intellectualism, we are puzzled at first to say whether we have advanced in it or away from it. We have done both. Intellectualism has evolved to a point when it strives to obliterate itself. Suppression, indeed, of more than intellectualism is a conscious policy of this music. The same turn of the tide which left eloquence and earnestness high and dry in this country, and taught us to prefer an off-hand and casual utterance for our most sacred articles of belief, produced a school of art:

> De la musique avant toute chose,
> Et pour cela préfère l'impair
> Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
> Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou pose.

That formula, which Verlaine gave to so many poets and artists of a modern yesterday, we find Debussy working out in music. To define is to delimit; to commit oneself to a statement is to be open to confutation; to be dramatic is to be haunted by the dreadful doubt that one is melodramatic; to allow oneself to grow excited is to forget the cool, unsympathetic, superior eye which finds one vulgar. Whereas to be vague sets no limit to the possible range of expression; to avoid weightiness is to be safe from being weighed and found wanting; to be dispassionate is to throw upon the listener the responsibility of such thrills as he may feel.

It is music which claims to be absolutely free. But freedom can only be realized unto some end. If the

wanderer can only preserve the illusion of freedom by refusing to go under any roof lest he should become seizable, lest his art should be committed to that *qui pèse ou pose*, then the wilderness is his prison; emancipation is really a sort of claustrophobia. Debussy's freedom is not without such a fear, and the sense of extreme mobility may suddenly turn to the sense of extreme restraint. The music then seems full of suppressions because it is in fear of the obvious, because its feeling is self-conscious, its intelligence self-critical; because, paradoxically, of its boundless ambition—it will close its arms on nothing, rather keep them open lest it appear to grasp less than all.

One interesting discovery, however, emerges: suppression finds a new way of securing dramatic intensity. Chopin, on one celebrated occasion, when he was too weak with illness to play an outstanding passage in adequate *fortissimo*, chose to play it *pianissimo*, with immense effect. Debussy sometimes exploits the same simple law of reversal; intensity is suggested by giving the least possible indication of it.

Take the description in *Jean Christophe* of a first impression of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a description that represents well enough, I suppose, the normal experience:

After the first act:

'Is it like that all the time?'

'Yes.'

'Why, there's nothing in it.'

Kohn was shocked and called him a philistine.

'Not a thing,' continued Christophe. 'No music. No development. It isn't consecutive. It hasn't any being. Some very fine harmonies. Some nice little orchestral effects, very tasteful. But it's nothing, absolutely nothing. . . .'

He set himself to listen again. Gradually the lamp shone out; he began to see something in the twilight. . . . The French

musician seemed to have striven, with ironical discretion, to make all these passionate sentiments murmur quietly. Love, death—without cries. It was only by an imperceptible trembling in the melodic line, a quiver in the orchestra like a tightening of one's lips, that one was aware of the drama that was passing in these souls.

A quiver in the orchestra like a tightening of one's lips—the revelation of such an effectiveness comes like a rebuke to violence of action and passionate declamation and the titanic travail of the orchestra to pile Pelion on Ossa. By its very restraint it stimulates, in a susceptible mood, a sort of hypertrophy of the imagination, like those nightmarish vigils of our childhood, when a minute whisper of sound seemed to swell out into the roar of many waters; or the pressure of one finger resting on another to become the annihilating total of all the weight in the universe.

Here is a new range of expression for music. Wagner himself might have come to it. Perhaps he did. There certainly are many cases of thematic allusions, subtle, almost hidden, whose effect is to intensify enormously the dramatic situation of the moment, or to throw quite a new light on it. From its very nature, however, the device of what we might call the least possible suggestion cannot be set in operation without a complete renunciation of the opposite method. Debussy made such a renunciation. But the problem arises, how much did it cost him? One echoes the cynical query, 'whether the source of this ideal of sacrifice was not just that one sacrificed what one hadn't got?' For Wagner, to have checked the torrent of energy that rushed into the second act of *Tristan* or the conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung* would have been an appalling sacrifice. It might have been justified. Such a power

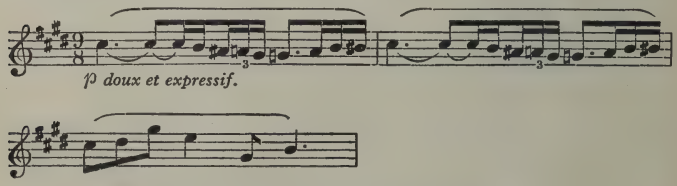
suppressed might have given us a still more stupendous conception. Wagner might have said in effect:

> In tragic hints here see what evermore
> Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
> Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
> To throw that faint thin line upon the shore.[1]

and given us in his music only the 'faint thin line'. But the appalling thing for most composers would be the attempt to supply anything more than tragic hints. The great renunciation of lyricism and eloquence is more likely to represent impotence that resigns the task than super-strength that will not stoop to it. The rebuke to Wagnerian uproar and emotionalism is hardly valid until it comes from one who is in a position to sacrifice what Wagner possessed and chooses to do so.

This all sounds rather hostile and barren of acknowledgement to Debussy. It is the fault of pressing too summarily to a conclusion along the side-line we are following at present. It would be rankly ungrateful not to put in a few words at least for the exquisite pleasures one has found in Debussy, failing which, indeed, his name would not have mattered enough to come into this narrative.

There is that ten minutes of dream-stuff, most delicious dish in modern orchestral fare; I should think even the world-weary professional critic is seldom safer from a sigh of boredom or a groan of satiety than when the flute breathes:



[1] Last lines of Meredith's *Modern Love*.

Through all the delicate, lovely music-stuff[1] that ensues one's cup is full; and then the moment comes, towards the end, that makes mine run over with deliciousness, just as one remembers it used to do long ago in happy fields under one of those rare suffusions of self-consciousness when one caught oneself being happy and sighed because it was all so good. Faithfully the music expresses it for me, at exactly the right moment, 'in a voice sad with the whole of pleasure'.[2]

If I mention one piece from the pianoforte music I am in no doubt as to which it shall be. *La Cathédrale engloutie* was the first thing of Debussy's that made me feel his greatness, and it has kept its hold. One doesn't easily relate Browning's 'Abt Vogler' to the work of modernists, yet words to which we would naturally fit some big organ-fugue of Bach can come to remembrance, not so very incongruously, when the last vibration of this noble tone-poem has died away:

> Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
> Gone, and the good tears start . . .

The most brilliant and least tame of English music critics once, in a slack hour, assumed the role of pedagogue and warned the musical aspirant against trying to begin acquaintance with Debussy by tackling *La Cathédrale engloutie*. He proceeded to sketch out for the guidance of such a one a line of advance, classifying a few pieces in three groups, progressive from the point of view of appreciation. Beyond these were to come the late works,

[1] *L'Après-midi d'un faune.*

[2] I lift that perfect description from E. Œ. Somerville and Martin Ross—'There you are,' said Jimmy Doyle, in a voice sad with the whole of pleasure, 'that's the hunt' (*Dan Russel the Fox*). I believe they lifted it from Rossetti.

which were again to be graded. Finally the aspirant would be qualified to approach *La Cathédrale*, with trepidation, but not necessarily despair.

That is typical of the voice of authority in these matters. I speak up from the back benches and I say this is all wrong. I suppose I scraped acquaintance with Debussy pretty much on these lines, and it remained very chilly. I knew the Arabesques of the first stage; no more than pretty they seemed; like Chaminade or dilute Chopin. The *Jardins sous la pluie* and *Soirée dans Grenade* of the second group sounded weird but trivial. A Ballade warmed things up a bit. Then even my persistent impulse of curiosity and inquiry petered out when it struck *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*. Till one day I heard *La Cathédrale*. Marry, this was something! This was reason. Formerly 'twas neither rhyme nor reason. I heard it again and again, with steadily increasing admiration. It was *La Cathédrale* which won me over, and would surely have done so had it come first. Only afterwards did I begin to work back and savour the delicate *Jardins* and others.

I would risk generalizing from myself to other people. I would start the inquirer with *La Cathédrale*. Incidentally I don't believe it will puzzle or shock him anything like as much as musicians seem to expect. But the all-important point is that he will feel he has to do with something that matters; he will know there is something here worth getting hold of; he will be able to believe that this is great music, and that there really are people who love it.

I would generalize also from Debussy to other composers. I think musicians who are trying to help popular appreciation of music should put away every academic preconception; the line of training for appreciation is quite different from the logical course that the student of music

may have to follow. It should be craggy, not a smooth *Gradus ad Parnassum*. If there is to be a rule, I should say: bring out the best wine first; begin with the most characteristic and most deeply-felt work of the composer that you know. I'm not prepared to maintain that rule absolutely, but in most cases it is pretty safe to say that a supreme example in any genre will have something universal about it. The work with which an artist has entered into full command of his medium and methods is the work that is most likely to establish some emotional contact even with the complete outsider.

Generalizing still more, I suggest that what is wrong with music appreciation methods is that they are musico-centric (sorry!) and not homocentric. It is the listener who needs to be tuned-in to music, not so much the music adapted to him. For example, I suppose it would be beneath the dignity of an expert to advise listening in the dark. It is a fact, nevertheless, that nearly all of us do find our receptivity is better in the dark, and for the plain man, not used to attending to music, I should put the difference at something like a thousand per cent.

They are apt to be too puritan, our instructors. They are shocked at a partiality for *The Rosary* or *Nazareth*, and rebuke it and try to lay a true foundation with folk-song. That is inevitably the musical point of view—start with the simple stuff, undefiled because it is not sophisticated enough to know how to be anything else. But it is bad psychology. An ability to appreciate and love the simple is really very advanced. A natural taste for it is as rare as a boy who prefers old ballads to bloods, and its possessor is as little in need of tutoring. Probably the educator succeeds only in making the listener distrust his own response. If the latter is a docile specimen he may

formulate a secret working-rule: 'Whenever music is thick and exciting or moving it is safe to be bad; when it is thin and dull and plain it is fairly safe to be good.'

'Appreciation' that worked more from the human end would take out of the corner the bad boys who revelled in flashy or treacly things and put them at the top of the class. Because, as Mr. Chesterton says, 'good taste is gusto'. It would then show them where they could get still sharper excitements and more delicious emotional baths. Then, and only then, they might be helped to see how the first objects of their affection were unworthy of it, had been vamping them. After that there is room to work out a line of advance, based on the nature of man, not on the theory or history of music, by which music might, bit by bit, penetrate and possess their life more deeply, first dallying with the fantasy-emotions, then having access to the serious springs of thought and action, then communing with the faiths and intuitions that underlie all—stages that in my case were inscribed with the chief names, Chopin, Wagner, Beethoven.

To return from this digression and come to a conclusion about Debussy: When all has been said about the delicate art he developed, his tenuous atmospheres, his feeling after the inner essence of things, it remains true that his music can never succeed in putting out of countenance the art of earnest-minded excitable people, the art of Wagner, for example, as the art of Wagner puts out of countenance Italian opera. There is a deeper reason for this than the mere fact that Debussy happens to be a light-weight, and a light-weight doesn't challenge outside his own class; a reason that questions not only his achievement but his tendency.

Taking Debussy very seriously, his is a sort of vision that sees so far into the infinite that the concrete drama of life is diminished to a tiny play of puppets rather than magnified into melodrama. I think I am voicing an impression of this music that ought to be recognizable if I say that Debussy *depersonalizes* the world. Now the infinity which lies at the end of that line is the emptiness of infinite space. The coolness of his music, which strikes so fresh and pleasing, this coolness of Nature, or of human passions seen small, is really the dropping of the temperature towards *minus* 273° C.—absolute zero. Without launching into the deep it is sufficient to say that my instinct, like that of most people of our time, seems to find the trail of truth lying through personality, and not away from it. Therefore it becomes difficult to believe that Debussy, or the tendency which he represents, is on the main-road, as Wagner was on the main-road, of the eternal search.

4

We are now the better prepared to try a cast forward in the opposite direction, with Wagner himself for our guide. Wagner himself leads us to that point where the boundaries of his art are breakable, and almost broken, by his own hunger for regions beyond.

The view of the world revealed in the music-dramas is a pessimism. Wagner sees human personality and all human desirings and aspirings against the background of an impersonal, loveless universe, into which every drama of life must ultimately be swallowed up with tragedy. The one virtue in such a world, the only possible basis of a morality, is sympathy, compassion. By sympathy one identifies oneself with suffering, deluded humanity; by sympathy one takes sides with the futile, doomed figures

of men, rather than, like the Stoic, with the nihilism of the universe.

One hardly need point out the peculiar fitness of such a view of the world to be the matrix of a mighty and most poignant art. It has temperatures and stresses able to forge the transcendent expression of itself that we have in the *Liebestod*—in which Isolde's self-assertion touches an irrational triumph on the very edge of the eternal dark.

But there is no stability in this system. It is not possible for any man to hold it against its own violent pressure to go backward or forward. It is a discord which demands resolution. Resolution can come either by the emptying of personality of every passion, until, self-annihilated, it becomes one with the cosmos, which is the Buddhist Nirvana; or else by love, which believes in personality, and follows it out into the unknown, and will not let it go except into an ultimate reality akin to it—which means a faith like the Christian faith.

I had no analysis of this sort at the back of my mind when I first went to hear *Parsifal*, but I expected it to be different. From my fragmentary knowledge of the music and what I had heard or read about it, *Parsifal* was that which was to come. I was receptive enough; ready for a revelation or a revolution. Many musical folk will remember the state of mind in which they approached it, all haloed in its unique shrine at Bayreuth, or, as for me, only recently enlarged from that monopoly.

The effect was not like my first experience of *Tristan*. *Parsifal* was enormously impressive of course, but confusing; I did not venture to say confused. I had no idea how I was going to rank it in comparison with its forerunners. I did not know what allowance to make for the subject itself and the mere circumstances of its presentation, which

would be bound in any case to awe one. Or, on the other side, what to allow for one's own slowness of mind and heart if Wagner were really breaking new ground. I thought the drama built up of scenes sublimely conceived, but when it was all over no clear word had emerged, or could even be disentangled, as unmistakably what Wagner had to say.

One thing was sure: the seriousness and solemnity of Wagner's purpose. This was plainly no relaxing but an effort to surpass all he had ever seen or felt or expressed. And the nature of the effort was to present a gospel. In the other great music-dramas what clung mortally together was torn asunder; what was mightily built up was undermined and slid in ruins. But here what is discordant is gathered into harmony; Parsifal's own ignorant cruelty, Klingsor's malignancy, Kundry's seductiveness, Amfortas's agony are overcome, purged or healed. And at the last a ray from above shines out, a dove descends, the Grail glows purple. Parsifal has found, has wrought reconciliation. He is not silhouetted against the empty skies, but is at one with the power and will behind all things.

That is the new world where Wagner fain would be. But how he gets there and whether he gets there remains a problem. Without having studied the thought of the drama I should nevertheless be bolder now to call not merely myself but it confused.

Wagner's world-view had been, as I said, unstable, having a pressure within tending to move it either backward or forward. It was a clash which could be resolved either by emptying man or filling in God. In *Parsifal* his position seems to suffer disruption in both directions at once. Side by side are the apparently incompatible ideas of redemption by love, and redemption by renunciation of love and

everything else. Perhaps there is no harm in that. Anybody's faith, from the atheist's upwards, may look confused when it has to be explicitly set forth. Consistency and logicality are not necessary hall-marks here; they are more likely to be tokens of a pin-head or a pedant.

But the music? There we should have it, or what 's music for? The music must be new. Music not of defiance but of reconciliation; born in a new way, not of Wagner but welling through him. God is its composer, as there have indeed been human composers at times to declare (Haydn: 'Not from me but from above it all has come'), which at least tells us something of the attitude in which it was conceived.

The music of *Parsifal* tries to be the offspring of a new world-view. That is as obvious from the Prelude onwards as what is asserted in the action and symbols. It is threaded with the chant of faith; has the sovereign harmony of the 'Dresden Amen' continually imposed upon it; shrinks not from depicting a green land redeemed where 'peace comes dropping slow'. This last, the Good Friday Spell, calls especially for a new song; but with all its grave and radiant beauty it creates no conviction that it comes from an inch past the sensuous Wagner one already knows.

Above all it was the Finale that, from the first, gave me a foreboding of unfulfilled purpose. A failure here was critical. One remembered *The Ring* and *Tristan*. The four parts of *The Ring* were evolved to lead up to the tremendous close of *Götterdämmerung*; the whole drama and the whole music of *Tristan* move towards the climax of the *Liebestod*. They are both overwhelmingly impressive embodiments of Wagner's tragic faith; they ask for the quintessence of his music. But the *Erlösung* fails to put that possible or impossible crown on *Parsifal* which would

be the only perfect fulfilment. The music that would crown this work could not be fused and moulded in the old matrix, between the opposing pressures of Love and Death, of living Personality and unknowing, uncaring Fate. Beating up from the human side, as Wagner does here, to the utmost limits of thought and feeling, there should come the breaking in at last of light from the other side. If *Parsifal* has found a way of life we want to see it shining as the eternal way.

Remember what the descending dove is intended to recall—a voice from heaven saying, 'This is my belovèd Son'. That is, the suggestion that Parsifal has not merely found a noble and beautiful way to make the best of a bad world, but that the world was made for him to find this way. This is the reconciliation the drama strains towards. But, in spite of celestial choirs and various symbolisms, it is just what does not happen.

So we wait for a music, which the drama presages and demands, but which never materializes. One wants more than the exquisite decoration, interweaving, soaring, and sublimation of the main themes; one wants some unimaginable transformation of them, or else some great new theme altogether. No, more still, something that we can feel lies outside Wagner's range; one cannot imagine it as continuous with this music whose proud fires as they die clothe themselves with ever richer vesture of dissolving colour.

What sort of need was this? Was it asking for the impossible? Had I come to the edge, not of Wagner merely, but of music itself? Or, as some perhaps would suggest, did it just call for a switch over to the other line of approach, the 'classical' instead of the 'romantic'; music that starts from the universal, not the individual, and never arrives

at a limit? Certainly not so simple a need as that. Symmetry and serenity will not easily get a hearing in a world in which so great a fire has been lit. And yet neither was it an utterly impossible demand. A time came later when I discovered things in music that seemed actually to voice what those fond symbols of ray and dove and glowing Grail try to proclaim. There are moments in some of Beethoven's late slow movements when we find ourselves breathlessly still, surrounded by a light that strikes downward from above, infinitely remote, infinitely near.

It would be anticipating to say more. Wagner brings us on our pilgrimage; he leads us to the boundary of his art, and it is all but breaking through, not towards an art of the future, but towards that master of the past whom he himself believed to have spoken the last word in pure music.

5

Somewhere in the middle of this period there came a comparatively brief interlude of Tchaikovsky.

How richly satisfying Tchaikovsky can be at a certain stage of development! No one else has such throbbing, warm-blooded themes that are just all one could wish; and themes too that seem to bring back some old glamour of stage tragedy. There are several things (e.g. the first movement of the Piano Trio) I never hear without recalling from far-back days the close, exciting air of the theatre, and a distant stage on which things passionately sad and romantic are happening—a flavour like a salt taste in the mouth.[1]

The pilgrim comes to Tchaikovsky as a natural passing

[1] This last simile sounds a bit mysterious to myself when I consider it in cold blood. Its elucidation would need the help of a psychoanalyst. I leave it on the off-chance that some one may greet it with recognition.

on in his search for thrills, more poignant and more harrowing; and for power, wild, ramping, stunning power. And Tchaikovsky, as it seems to me now, represents the blind-alley into which this line of seeking leads one. There was nothing beyond, in the way of more abandon, or further devices and resources to express it. This music was a cul-de-sac, and ultimately a barren one. It gathered up the seeker and led him to bafflement. The thirst that it stimulated it could not quench. It was a music which was for ever surging up, full of passion, desire or fear; and it never attained. It could rush you excitingly up the slope of a climax, but there was nothing at the top. After every towering assault came the inevitable subsiding in weary listlessness or sullen muttering.

The Pathetic Symphony, as might be expected, was my first flame; but the warmest and longest passion, not yet cold, was for the Symphony in E minor, and particularly for the *Andante cantabile*. Many days had my player, taking full advantage of the *con alcuna licenza* direction, to render it, morning, noon and night, before its enthralling hold on my senses began to slacken. I think I might say, as Johnson did of Burton's book, that it is the only composition that ever got me early out of bed. In it could be found the typical example bearing out what I have just said. At the top emotional point, where the second subject makes its most furious entry, a force of men might be rushing up a sweep of stairs to hurl themselves against studded doors. At the moment of shock it seems as if the doors had burst; but after the first note of the theme, if ever they had shown a crack of light, they are seen as fast shut as before, and every other forlorn rush is doomed to break on them in vain. The failure is symbolic of the failure of all this music. In its violence is the note of bafflement.

Tchaikovsky makes one suspect at last what may be a mournful truth, that every big and passionate musical climax has in it something of failure; you can't march your men up the hill without having to march them down again. I fancy Chopin once made an interesting attempt to evade this necessity. In the F major Ballade he builds up one of his most prodigious preparations. In the middle register the music beats fast, like the pace of running feet; in the bass there are drum-rolls, and the plaintive little theme of a moment before becomes the plunging stride of a giant beginning to go Berserk; then, from the top, Kundry-like shrieks. While the music fights up to the critical modulation you wonder breathlessly what is going to happen, as a man might wonder while he was being hurled through the air in a motor-smash. What awful, unheard-of thing can justify such a preparation? There's the crash of the impact, and instantly the whole accumulated tempest of sound is shut off. Silence. And then enters, *pianissimo*, the *andantino* tune with which the Ballade began. Just a bar or two, questioning. Three gentle words of reply. And that is the end. When I first wrote this book I gave way to the temptation to carry on my simile of a motor-crash, as the novelist might have described it, following the crash with a row of dots, and then: 'When I opened my eyes a pale face of angelic beauty hung over me and a sweet low voice was saying, "Drink this".' But I would not for worlds make fun of the Ballade. It is a beautiful Ballade and gorgeously exciting; and it does show an interesting attempt to get to the top of a climax without having to come down on the other side.

Tchaikovsky also, one must not forget, wrote the B flat minor Piano Concerto, the opening of which is, of all music

ever written, the most satisfying thing to outpour when one is just bursting with life. I make that absolute claim for it. It is a high distinction to have been the composer to supply best that particular need. Fortunately for its usefulness a fairly adequate presentation can be managed by two good hands on a piano. I had a player transcription, of course, and when I came to the surface after a morning's work, those were the strains that would most often resound and bring on lunch in a hurry.

I lived at the seaside then, and on a day of storm, under the cliffs, I have found that mighty, mouth-filling song a thing to shout, while the great sea itself put in the crashing chords of the pianoforte part:

It does somehow catch the movement and effect of incoherent natural forces and the rough-hewn song that emerges, as when on a rocky shore, in a blinding whirl of wind and spume, the roar of the breakers comes through to one in snatches; a big sea up-tosses to that dominant, and another instantly reiterates it; nor is there lacking a dizzy little leap beyond. . . .

This Concerto was more responsible than anything else for a dream belonging to those days of one of the possible uses of being a millionaire. If there is one person whose lot seems to me enviable, it is the fine artist, playing with a first-rank orchestra music big enough to set him free. To have the great concert instrument under one's hands, trained

and tuned to a hair like a race-horse, in all its sensitiveness of touch and waiting energy; to feel the music towering round one, and to be lifted, yet commanding, on its crest; to strike the deep note that swings the whole body of sound through the air to a new key-platform, and sets it there as on bed-rock—that must be one of the most glorious experiences that life can yield. My dream involved the building of such a pianoforte as never was. The Queen's Hall might hold it. The bass strings should stretch from floor to ceiling; and where the common or drawing-room instrument is a trichord, mine, in the upper octaves, should be a centichord at least. The action was to be operated electrically, and of course it should have a player-action also fitted; I didn't figure myself standing by, a mere listener, while other people exploited the resources of my pianissimo-fortissimo. Then, the leading London and provincial orchestras being massed, and Arthur Nikisch (in those days) being entrusted with the baton (but taking his time from me, the solo player-pianist), a rendering of Tchaikovsky's B flat minor Concerto would be given—the sort of rendering that would be recorded by seismographical instruments.

I recognize the voice of another who has known these gigantesque dreams and cravings (which, for me, are associated with Tchaikovsky) when I find 'W. N. P. Barbellion' (author of *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*) writing:

'I was once walking on the sands by the sea when a great wave of joyfulness swept across me. I stood up on a rock and waved my stick about—and sang. I wanted the sands to be crowded with a great male-voice chorus—hundreds of thousands of men—so many that there should be no standing room for more. I imagined myself standing above them, a physical and musical Titan on the top of a high mountain as high as

Mont Blanc, conducting with a baton as large as a barge pole. The breakers would boom an accompaniment, but the chorus would be heard above everything else, and even God Himself would turn from schemes for new planets (and less hopeless ones than this) to fling a regret for injustice done to such spirited people!'[1]

I should like to remark that my pianissimo-fortissimo is to-day perfectly possible, in effect at any rate, without need for a millionaire. Any little upright piano would do, coupled with thermionic-valve amplification. Loud-speakers have been constructed that can be heard ten miles away. A small brother of these allowed to roar gently in the Queen's Hall could provide an experience that many people might like to try. Thousands must have felt this lust of loudness. Who that is thrilled at all by that long *crescendo* section with the octave figure in the bass in Chopin's A flat Polonaise would not be greedy for it to swell and swell till the volume of sound hurt one physically? There is no lack of music in which composers' own inordinate desires are revealed by the doubled, trebled, and quadrupled *f*'s they run to in their indications.[2]

[1] From the essay 'Crying for the Moon'.

[2] As this goes to press I have just seen a description of the 'Neo-Bechstein' pianoforte, which is about to make its first appearance in this country.

PART THREE

I

ALL this time you must not think of me as a stranger to Beethoven; that would be impossible. But I was indifferent to his music. Under pressure the indifference became hostility. The general consent about his name set up antagonism, as it is apt to do. People like Lord Mayors tell interviewers that their favourite books are Shakespeare and the Bible, which makes it much more unlikely that a bookish youngster will discover merit in these works. In music Beethoven got a terrible lot of homage of the sort it is easy to scorn, his name being a good name oratorically, much better than Chopin or Wagner or Bach. Of course there was also other testimony, weighty testimony, from people who certainly cared for music, besides knowing a hundred times as much about it as I did. If I were faced with that—well, I was an outsider, on my own; authority in the musical world did not concern me, except to cause a genuine perplexity and deepen the sense that some one was very much outside, either myself, or everybody else. Privately I suspected the rest of the world; outwardly I said simply, after innumerable trials, that Beethoven was not for me.

There were things I enjoyed well enough. I always made an exception, for example, in favour of the *Waldstein* Sonata. And—here is a curious fact—the *Waldstein* was the only work that receded in value when I began to waken up to Beethoven. (The first movement, with its fine drive and devil, seemed weakened by a second-subject that sounded like an imitation of Beethoven second-subjects by himself. The gracious goddess of the Rondo came under suspicion of being only a stage-artist posing

as one, too nude, too self-conscious, and taking too many encores.)

I can recall my complaints and criticisms of those old days. Some of them seem true enough still, and yet are not a bit damning, as I thought they were; the whole background against which one sees them has changed. In other cases the only interest is the humbling one of seeing how incredibly blind and wide of the mark one could be.

Thus I can understand myself thinking that a lot of Beethoven's output was small beer. Alongside the heady stuff of Chopin, Wagner, and Tchaikovsky it did not seem to me to have sufficient reason for existing. The dullness was chiefly my dullness, but of course Beethoven did write and publish a great deal of music which makes no pretence that the composer or anybody else need be excited about it. I thought he did not take music seriously enough.

I could not help being impressed by some of his grave, close-textured, slow themes. The theme at the beginning of the Opus 26 Sonata seemed good enough for Chopin:

But what did he do with such themes when he had got them? Proceed to write a series of formal variations on them, numbered 1, 2, 3, &c. I had heard things like that, variations on 'Home, sweet home' or 'Ye banks and braes', and considered them a bit low. I can still be disappointed with Beethoven's treatment of a tune. I think the most maddening case is the first movement of the Opus 97

Trio. We are given right off one of the grandest tunes in the world: [1]

But the movement never does more than tinker with it. Fine nervous music it is, but finicky; secondary stuff to that full noble statement which seems to be always impending, yet never comes, choked off even at the end after a stirring preparation and actual entry. It looks as if Beethoven hardly knew what to do with a tune (as against a brief 'subject') when he got one. Perhaps nobody really does. But certainly Beethoven is sometimes more visibly embarrassed, especially in slow movements, than composers of far smaller calibre would be.

At a later stage, when I had seen a great light but was still kicking against the pricks, I found two more specific faults in Beethoven which I thought showed he was a thick-skinned fellow. First, he had a rough and ruthless way of breaking up a state of exalted reverie created by himself. What would be thought of the man who, hardly giving exquisite music time to die, cried explosively 'Now let's have a game of carpet-bowls'? Why should we not think the same of Beethoven when that is exactly what he does? Immediately after he has lifted us to the heights seems to be his chosen time for thrusting on us a rather

[1] The opening tune of the Quartet Opus 59[1] is a slightly less splendid variant of the same conception.

empty, noisy finale which we should not care for much at any time, or a finale of exuberant gaiety which we can't accept at such a time without a qualm. 'Well, well,' he seems to say, 'enough of this moonshine.' There will be some wrestling with this particular Beethoven problem further on.

The other thing that jarred on me was that he could come to a stop and make a new beginning with the same material in a different key, a proceeding that completely snapped the emotional thread as far as I was concerned. It did not happen often, but I came up against it in two of the biggest things. The dramatic reality was suddenly knocked out of the splendid *Leonora No. 3* at the most dramatic point in this way. And in that great movement of the Opus 106 Sonata which is going to loom over the horizon very soon now, the one flaw was a glaring case of this sort of new beginning involving a break of emotional continuity. Probably musicians don't feel this, but I did and still do.[1]

These are all criticisms which seem to me to have had some grain of truth. The validity has not clean gone out of them. What has changed is the whole set of one's mind and the background against which one sees them. Now

[1] Dr. Walker commented on this when it was first written: 'I rather gather from your remark on *Leonora No. 3* that you do not know that very many modern musicians do agree with you strongly on this particular point; though personally I do not. You, like many others, feel that dramatic reality involves progress, movement in time; to me it can quite well be a stationary thing, as no doubt the *Leonora*, as a structural organism, is. Beyond any doubt, you have very many (possibly most) modern musicians with you in feeling a certain rebelliousness at recapitulation as being in itself something of an anti-emotional feature in a scheme. I personally do not, though in many ways I am an ultra-modernist.' I have let the text stand for the sake of appending Dr. Walker's note.

I cheerfully admit them. There are spots on the sun. They are amusing; I could find a sort of luxurious pleasure in dwelling on imperfections in one who has all my admiration and reverence.

There were also, however, other judgements and opinions. I can recall things said and apparently felt (friends recall them more willingly) that fairly stagger me now. I said that Beethoven's music was always happy, and never anything but happy. That was a lunatic remark. I think I was on the look-out for vulgarity. I said, for example, that the Home-coming movement of the *Les Adieux* Sonata seemed to represent nothing so much as the excitement and tail-chasing demonstrations of the family dog. I had a notion of Beethoven as a comfortably optimistic sort of person, composing because it was his job. 'There's no *passion* in Beethoven,' I would say. (Please remember this hurts me far more than it does you.) Take the Sonata that has got itself called *Appassionata*. Look at it. Look at the first sentence of it. How prim! How self-contained! And those scales and twiddles! God help you, is that what you call passionate music? What was that famous outburst of Eric's—' "Pish," said Eric, now thoroughly aroused.'

And so on. I have told the worst. The rack could not twist out of me more appalling confessions. There is no point in multiplying them when so obviously the whole trouble was that I was quite unconscious of and impervious to the force and weight of the man's personality and utterance. I was like a babe saying 'Pretty-pretty' to a cobra, or thumping it over the head with a spoon. I was like a yokel meeting Napoleon at an inn and despising him or patronizing him for a pale little stumpy fellow. After the musical company I had kept I could not believe that

Beethoven was a fighter because his eye was steady; I could not believe he had scaled the heights because he was not bloody and breathless. A big awakening was to come.

2

In the first part of this book, at the start of my musical journey, stands a little *salon* piece of Chopin's, which led on to the discovery of music of sensuous beauty and thrilling expressiveness. The second stage began when a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* burst the boundaries within which Chopin was supreme; music became more serious, life-size, claimed me more deeply. Now I come for the third time to the frontier of a new country, and again there is a memorable landmark.

One day there arrived by accident in a box of music-rolls one I had never heard nor heard of. It was the *Adagio sostenuto* of the 'Grosse Sonate für das Hammer-klavier', Opus 106. I tried it after a while without a glimmer of expectation. I thought I knew the sort. These large, titled, little-known works—it would be dull, obscure, or empty, pretentious stuff. I cannot remember of course (I wish I could), but I really think that when I played the opening bars I must have dimly heard Beethoven's voice for the first time. I know I was enormously impressed and subdued by the first playing. Thereafter I could not get away from it. Sometimes I would hurry home to play it, and put it on with fingers that almost trembled. Contrari-wise, sometimes I would avoid it, go all round it, play anything but that, just as a schoolboy will sometimes go out of his way to escape meeting a girl he is smitten with—a sort of inertia, I suppose, that makes one at times prefer an even keel to being tossed even ecstatically on waves of deep feeling. I had noticed in myself this curious effect

once or twice before, but never in relation to Beethoven. In reporting the discovery to a friend I said pleasantly that the work was probably regarded by musicians as an inferior one. But I knew better. This was at the top; neither I nor any one could question that. Later I read a book on Beethoven, and found I had come into line at last with the word of authority: 'one of the supreme things in all music', this movement was called.

So I arrived at Beethoven, not without a feeling that I was the last that ever burst into that well-known sea. Looking back, I think it must have been the sheer size of this particular movement that overcame me. Is there anything else in music that carries such a sense of vastness? With the first grave steps one enters a cathedral of sound of such immense and solemn grandeur that it must touch with awe even the philistine who has wandered in. The massive depth of the part-writing, the soaring heights, dim and soft though the revelation of them is, are the very thunder of beauty, that makes even the deaf man hear something. I know it is not easy to believe that any one capable of saying what I had said about the *Appassionata* could get much out of Opus 106, and it not even decently played. But there is the fact, one was simply bowed down at last before the thing unchallengeably great, which no imagined comparison could dwarf. You might like to know that my landlady came into my room one night after I had been playing it, wanting to know what was that wonderful music she had heard several times lately. She had been listening to it all alone. Her eyes were wet. She had a strong musical susceptibility, but out of all my daily hours of strumming I never knew her inquire about anything else in particular. Should you like, by the by, to know what Beethoven himself said about this Sonata?—'It's

a hard thing to have to write just for one's bread.' The notion of Opus 106 as a pot-boiler I think is exceedingly diverting.

This piece of music, coming, as I have described, out of the blue, effected something like the bursting of a dam. Things happened fast. There was a flood of Beethoven. His music came rushing in on me, not bit by bit, but all one's accumulated knowledge suddenly in motion, energized, transformed. Almost hourly odd fragments would sound in my ears with a new meaning, while I walked in the street, or in bed as I was falling asleep. Day unto day uttered speech; night unto night showed knowledge. Most of all that superbest of the middle-period sonatas which I had gone out of my way to blaspheme began to glow and burn. I understood now the ascription *Appassionata.* To think of those fierce driving passages in the first movement that culminate in dizzy moments when you seem to be swung out over a precipice, with towns and people, 'small as emmets', far below! Or that final sacred rage in the coda, where I see Beethoven like Michelangelo attacking the marble with *furia*, making the chips fly like hail, cutting more marble in ten minutes than two young strong sculptors could cut in half an hour.

I suppose it was an experience as near 'conversion' as art can show; the sort of experience that cuts one's life in two. I know nothing could have been more incredible to the man I was than to foresee what I should some day be saying about Beethoven; and no words can express, as I look back, my sense of the darkness in which that man lived.

I believe something could be done for any one else in my case, sticking where I stuck so long. By carefully selecting works and movements a bridge might be built for any

one coming from the direction of Chopin. Yet it may well happen to others to arrive at Beethoven by the same topsy-turvy way as myself; some one of those third-period works into which any reasonable and well-regulated music-lover is supposed to be initiated last of all, may first make one aware of what then seems so plain, the mighty energy that is being ridden, dominated and held in many a master-piece which one had let pass by as though it were a formal parade. I said that in a humanized music history Debussy is quite likely to come before Bach, and, with a young generation accustomed to musical caviare before it has been fond of chocolate, it is to be expected that the world of Beethoven will become more and more accessible by the wrong end.

3

My strongest interest and curiosity centred in the immediate neighbours of Opus 106, those other late sonatas that one never seemed to hear played, for fairly obvious reasons. The heavy scoring was no deterrent to me, and I soon got to know very well that family of five, the centenarians of the Sonatas.

Can one call them a family? They stand apart from all the rest, but also they stand apart still more widely from one another. Never was a family in which each member was so unique and strongly-marked an individual. Though they are inevitably grouped together, any one of these dominating personalities is able to make you forget about the others. It is easier to trace, here and there in each of them, resemblances to earlier sonatas, resemblances of the sort that one notes between the grown man and his boyhood portraits, than to find any genuine kinship among themselves, though all are equal in stature and maturity,

and though all have certain technical features (fugal writing, for example) in common, and more or less exclusively to themselves.

The E major Sonata, Opus 109, is the least giant-like, the least masculine, the sister, let us say (if we nevertheless retain the family bond), of this band of brothers; not indeed the little sister, but virginal. With what adorable grace she comes across the meadows! When she speaks she has one of those warm voices that press against you. The agitation and high-strung resolve of the *Prestissimo* are still feminine; while the theme of the last movement, one of Beethoven's gentlest and loveliest, captivates us out-and-out and altogether when the Sonata ends with a simple re-statement of it:

Is it not mysterious how, very often, the value of a theme is immeasurably enhanced by its recall? When the opening subject of the Opus 101 Sonata reappears for a moment in the transition between the slow movement and the finale we feel as if we had failed till then to appreciate an infinity of vision and feeling in it.

The next Sonata, in A flat, Opus 110, alone of these five, one will occasionally find possessed by the ordinary amateur. I am not inclined to rank these intensely individual works relatively to one another, or to give praise by putting one above the others. Each has its own sphere,

lithosphere and atmosphere. About this one, I wonder only how many unknown lives have received it from Beethoven's hands, and found in its pages their very dear and very sacred and most intimate possession.

Opus 110 is far and away beyond any thought of musical effect. It is just the truth, when a man comes to it with a pure heart; that is to say, when a man has put off both rhetoric and irony, when he has stripped himself of the last bit of selfhood, and no longer wants to colour or distort, to impose his pattern on the facts or to exploit them for the glory of art—when all that has gone, and truth is like a naked child. Yet a pure heart does not mean one emptied of feeling. It is a mortal mistake to think truth is clearest in a cold light. There is only one comparison I can make. Beethoven in this sonata attains to a kind of sight that might represent Christ looking at the life of men. He sees life burdened, cleaving to the dust, yet traversed by what Ibsen called 'harps in the air'. With what infinite understanding and pity the music knows and loves and speaks to the human soul, knows it in its frailty, 'animula, blandula, vagula', but knows it as a breath breathed of God. How intimately it communes with us! How deeply we answer to it! Wagner embodied in the third act of *Parsifal* the deed of the woman who wept over the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; but this music, far more than Wagner's or any other that exists, could fit the thought of 'that one face' which was able to draw so passionate a response of love and tears.[1]

[1] The late Edward Carpenter sent me a copy of *Angel's Wings*, a book I had not seen when the above passage was written. In it he speaks of this Sonata: 'We have in the opening chords one of those subjects of profound pity and redemption worked out in the very consummation of Beethoven's art . . . the *Arioso dolente* with its Christ-like pity . . .'

All this relates to the quiet intercourse of the first movement. The Scherzo which follows I do not like; there is a blight of barrenness over it; the Trio is hateful, the crackling of thorns under a pot. But it is all most surely part of the intention of the Sonata. I suppose it had to be, before the beautiful song of the *Arioso dolente*, of the Via Dolorosa, shall we say, and the wonderful speaking recitatives which lead to the Fugue.

Are we meant to find in the Fugue what the Scherzo misses? It begins so differently, with no forced rush of gaiety, so quietly, so humbly, so undistinguished in its spirit of resolve. The entry of the counterpoint puts its delicious momentary blindness on my eyes; and from that moment the music has an inner light, a lamp of life, that shines out ever more brightly while the Fugue grows strong and grand. It is interrupted, to let back once more the beautiful sorrow of the *Arioso dolente*. After those strains have died away in a grave chord that is slowly reiterated in gradual *crescendo*, there is a silence. Then a lifting up of the eyes to where comes softly from above the inversion of the fugue, a fragile, new-born thing. It is a moment full of a feeling that makes me think of the pictorial seer's vision of a Lamb in the midst of the throne of the universe; a moment of extraordinary solemnity and sacredness. Why it should be so, with these elemental single notes . . . But if one knew that there would be no more mystery in music. The rest is all glad; the rhythm becomes delicately gay—an inner lightness of heart, that looks out to find all things made new. It is a spirit set free, a spirit on top of life, more than conqueror, that climbs the steeps towards a goal ever more clearly in sight. The soaring music attains the key in which it comes home at last, with an outburst of triumph and one glorious sweep of harp-strings, in which we

recognize a final fulfilment of the soft harp-strains in the first movement.

I see there are writers who shake their heads over Beethoven's essays in fugue. I suspect they have not heard all there is to hear in this Fugue, or they would have something else to think about than a comparison with Bach or any other music in the world. I realize that there are no pages in Beethoven more at the mercy of the pianist. When I first tried it myself it seemed no more than a sound-pattern. I am thankful I had the good fortune to know an interpreter able to make the hearing of it one of the most subtly moving and exalting experiences in music.

I come back to the question, Are we meant to find in the Fugue what the Scherzo misses? I have no wish to force a moral out of a sonata; but it seems to stare us in the face. Beethoven could write in the vein of gaiety or joviality, no one better. But not at this time and place. The music of the Scherzo flags; it has to be continually whipped up by sad-eyed men; the laughter of fools is the crackling of thorns under a pot.

Tchaikovsky also treated a scherzo, or what corresponds to one, in this way. He used the barrenness of forced merriment to sharpen the desolation of his Sixth Symphony. But this Sonata is not despairing, like Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. Nor does it find in pallid submission some bare escape from the tragedy of life and a poor sort of peace. We are not shown a blessed alternative in the pious strains of what is succinctly and sufficiently described in organ albums as a 'soft voluntary'. 'Eat, drink, and be merry', the feeble lie of the Scherzo, becomes the strong truth of the Fugue. There is the greatness of Beethoven. On the shining heights, here as elsewhere, he is not afraid to make music that is gay. In

which he is once more near to the great artist of life, who did not feel that he spoilt the story by making it end with the sound of music and feasting and dancing, the very things the Prodigal had sought in a land of husks.

By some parallel transformation represented in the intervening music, by some purification through suffering, this Sonata breaks upward into gladness and gaiety. After the *Arioso dolente* the Fugue takes the message out of the mouth of the Scherzo, and turns it from a pitiful pretence into a ringing song of joy.

I am afraid I have been led on into outlining something very like a 'programme' for this Sonata. It might be justified. As it happens there are circumstances which, I think, make it not so very incredible that Beethoven wrote the work like another and very different *Eroica*, 'Composed to celebrate the memory of a great Man'. (It was written, for example, while he was engaged on the great *Missa Solennis*.) But 'programmes' are chancy things, and I do not want any one to think that I rest weight on what may be merely my own ingenious parallelisms when I relate the A flat Sonata to the spirit of Christ. The evidence is direct; it is the actual content of feeling in the music. That evidence, too, may be doubted. It is so easy for the music-hearer to imagine things, so easy for the music-writer to pose, interpreters are so often at variance, that music cannot be called a very tangible or trustworthy language. Yet about this particular music I have a conviction that the expression of certain things is there as unmistakably as lines in a spectrum; that they could not be simulated; that they reveal facts of feeling and character in the composer as infallibly as characteristic lines in a solar spectrum reveal the presence of corresponding elements in the sun. I could be sure of them in the face of all biographical evidence.

As a matter of fact the Beethoven revealed in this Sonata (not in it alone, but in some ways most definitely in it) is not easy to reconcile with the mental picture of the man most of us have ready-made. Even idealized, that sombre, violent, proud man is a very long way from the gentleness, the lowliness, the infinite understanding, pity and patience of this Christ-like music.

If we turn to his writings we do not get much help. Sometimes we are very far away indeed when we seem to be getting warm. For example: 'Socrates and Jesus have been my models' strikes me as rather unreal; how any one sets about modelling himself on Socrates I can't guess. Exalted sentiments are coupled with a self-approval and an abhorrence of the wickedness of everyone else which may make them sound ludicrous or pitiable. The frequent prayers come from his heart, but they are more Jewish than Christian: 'O God, aid me! Thou wilt not leave me entirely in the hands of men; because I do not wish to make a covenant with injustice! Hear the prayer which I make to Thee, that at least for the future I may live with my Carl!—O cruel fate, implacable destiny! No, no, my unhappiness will never end.'

Nevertheless this particular quotation puts us on the track. It is in his relationship to Carl, the scapegrace nephew whom he had adopted, that we see glints of fine gold in the record of Beethoven's personal life. Of late years there has been a great deal of counter-attack on Carl's behalf. Indeed the facts are plain. We can readily understand that Beethoven as a guardian must have been not far from the world's worst in the eyes of youth, failing some miracle of perception and patience on youth's side. But, while the remembrance of his fussy, moody, suspicious ways will make us chary of judging Carl, there is no reason

why it should make us forget what Beethoven actually felt about that ne'er-do-well lad. He wrote like this:

'My dear son! No more of this! Come to my arms. You shall not hear one harsh word. I will receive you with the same love. We will talk over what is to be done for your future in a friendly manner. On my word of honour there will be no reproach. That would do no good. You have nothing to expect from me but sympathy and the most loving care. Come, come to the faithful heart of your father. Come immediately you receive this letter, come to this house.' And on the envelope: 'If you do not come you will surely kill me.' Again: 'Spoilt as you are, that should not make it difficult to teach you to be simple and true; my heart has suffered so much by your hypocritical conduct; and it is difficult for me to forget.' A little later Carl attempted suicide, and one biographer says it was Beethoven who nearly died. He might have put it more strongly. Beethoven's last illness followed quickly on the shock through which he 'became suddenly an old man of seventy'.

These are picked extracts, of course, but they are enough for me. There is no mistake. They reveal in another medium something about the heart of the man who wrote the A flat Sonata. The depths are there, obscured rather than manifested by occasionally ill-chosen or too rhetorical words, but the same depths, clear down into which we see through the music.

The problem which this Sonata has raised goes on and becomes even more acute in connexion with some of the music we shall soon be considering. I may as well add all I have to say.

The spiritual content of some of the last works is so wonderful that it becomes difficult to relate, especially

in certain marked qualities, to the personality of its composer. More so now than ever. The once-accepted portrait, used, consciously or unconsciously, by Romain Rolland as a model for 'Jean Christophe', and by Bernard Shaw in delineating 'Owen Jack'[1] (has any one noticed that Beethoven established the standard type of a composer for purposes of fiction or drama, just as I should say Shelley established the standard type of a poet?)—the once-accepted portrait had faults enough, but they were generous, likeable, laughable ones. Latterly it is repellent characteristics and actions that have had the spot-light turned on them, because they were formerly kept in the background even by the men who suffered through them. It is not easy to reconcile the Beethoven of music and the Beethoven of history. We read, say, the account of Beethoven's trading methods in disposing of Opera 109, 110, 111, 123, not, in any case, without discomfort and shame; then suddenly we recollect as from afar what this merchandise was—the last three piano sonatas and the *Missa Solennis*; and who Beethoven was—the man who created these things; and the two images refuse to merge. Well, I hold to the Beethoven of music. It may be legitimate to ask why he did not live more nearly as he played (it is a question he doubtless put to himself), but not if the underlying inference is that we are the victims of our own imagining or his posing. In the case of this man the inside evidence and the infallible evidence is in his music. We cannot expect to get from any other sources all the self-revelation that flowed into it. All we ask is that the biographical por-

[1] In *Love among the Artists*, pretty nearly the best thing Shaw ever did; a novel that ought to be much better known. I am glad to give a lift to Mr. Shaw. One does not like to see an author going without due recognition.

trait should leave room for it. And does it not? No one can read what is written of, or written by, Beethoven without feeling from what is told how great a part remains untold. The record that is dispassionately compiled from documents, including his own letters, has yet something missing at the centre without which a lot of it becomes only semi-real. All that apparatus of 'enemies' and 'arch-scoundrels' and 'traitors' was far more of a childish game than a man's real life. Beethoven lived the game, but it did not go much below the surface, as he showed often enough, and as the friends whom he frequently insulted usually understood. He was not so very unlike Shaw's Henry Higgins or Owen Jack, who could heap the bitterest curses on a man and be shocked at being thought capable of a really uncharitable sentiment. Similarly, in his dealings with publishers and agents I think it is pretty plain Beethoven held the romantic idea, not uncommon among artists, that business men are robbers and cunning knaves. He was always trying to meet them on their ground and to play them at what he took to be their game. But as most of them were just ordinary decent men of rectitude and honour, Beethoven shows up as the only one on the field whose methods justify his loudly expressed contempt for it; and the word went round in England, 'For God's sake, don't buy anything of Beethoven.'

I do not want to palliate; there are traits that are ugly and painful enough. I only want to express in some way my feeling that a great part remains untold in the frankest and most accurate record. Thayer, who so painstakingly and impartially investigated every happening and relationship, gave the world a biography from which nothing is missing except the real weight and worth of Beethoven himself. We guess at it; we deduce it indirectly from the kind of men who were among his friends, from the

extraordinary impression he could make even on some who were not susceptible to his music. 'A man of heart', 'the personification of strength', are typical judgements. Some of the strongest evidence to my mind, though it may not strike others in that way, is found in an unlikely place, among things said by Carl after he shot himself: 'It is not hatred of my uncle I feel, but something quite different.' 'I grew worse because my uncle wanted me to be better.' 'If he would only not show himself again!' One is reminded a little of what young Alcibiades said about Socrates: 'Sometimes I wish he was dead. And yet I don't. Bring some more wine.' It would not be far wrong to say that the Beethoven men knew face to face was not altogether at variance with the Beethoven of music, however irreconcilable the biographical picture may seem to be.

After all, nothing can eclipse the central truth about Beethoven, and it is a glorious one: 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness.' We remember the suffering that was wrought into his life. His earliest acquaintance with the world was like that of an ill-used and semi-derelict dog; he carried the inferiority of his puny body and pock-marked face, of his lack of education, of the poverty and drunkenness of his father. It made him a lone fighter, up against life, suspicious and pugnacious. There was mingled in, even in his childhood, experience of flattery and petting. It planted in him some of the craving that comes on a bull-dog to be a lap-dog. His essential loneliness was never able to accept and embrace independence. He thirsted for friendship but could not trust it, was unable to give himself to any friend. In his most prosperous years there was something bitter in his sociability, something harsh in his joviality. Again and again he felt life too much for him. He wrote in his note-book: 'For you

there is happiness only in your art.' But that retreat was not left to him inviolate. Fate, or some suggest Nemesis, followed him there. The sense of hearing was taken from him. We can only guess a little of what that meant to him. It is unbearable to think of him trying to conceal it, feeling it a shameful thing for a musician to be deaf. Is there any great artist of whom a thing so truly tragic is related as the description (accepted by Thayer) of his attempt to rehearse *Fidelio* in 1822? How it ended in confusion and deadlock, the composer turning from side to side, trying to read the expression of different faces and understand the difficulty, no one having the heart to say, 'Go away, poor unfortunate one; you cannot conduct.' Till the scene was ended by his rushing from the hall to his house, where he threw himself down, buried his face in his hands, and remained silent and motionless. The man who was passed through such a bitter alchemy of souls, and whose work was not embittered, and never in any place takes on even the note of frenzy, but rather is more and more characterized by passages of sweetness and joy, until, in certain of his latest pages, he touches depths and heights that are, it may be, the extremest achievements in expression of the human spirit—that man assuredly had an inner life otherwise unrevealed. Not in deed, not in word, but in music the inmost truth about Beethoven is known. He talked, though he talked as well as most, yet 'like poor Poll' beside that purified voice with which from time to time his music speaks, and through which it is simply unthinkable that anything but sincerity and truth could come.

The Sonata in C minor, Opus 111, is like a mighty obverse to its predecessor. What a pair they make, the one the most intimate, the other the most cosmic of all his

pianoforte works! Opus 111 in some ways resembles the *Appassionata*. The last Sonata of the volume recalls in its outward form the greatest pages in the central body of the book. But it is a parallel carried out on an immensely enlarged stage.

While the first movement lasts few of us, except in certain moods, would prefer this setting in an elemental world, where the forces are too vast to notice us, where the more vivid and piercing effects are put off as childish things. The stark power of the *Maestoso* introduction, the sublime coda, in which the music finally runs out in such a level close, remain most clearly printed on the memory.

The second movement, which is the last, and thus the last in the whole volume, is in C major. Beethoven-lovers have not failed to feel a fitness in that. See *Abt Vogler:*

Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
The C Major of this life; so, now I will try to sleep.

It is an Arietta with variations. I have said I disliked a set of variations for a slow movement, and held it against Beethoven that he so often adopted that form. It looked like a confession of impotence to give the material that higher unity which its place in the organism of a sonata demanded. But from this movement I first got an idea of what the variation form (apart from any other interest or value) could achieve in the way of organized unity and growth.

Because this is no mere string of lovely beads, and no mere unfolding, one by one, of latent qualities and aspects

of the subject. There is a continuous, cumulative effect of which no fragment could convey any impression. The movement grows round about the theme, clothing it with more and more abundant life. The rhythm doubles and re-doubles; once again we see that Beethoven was not afraid of laughter and tumult on the serene heights. There are those voices that he seemed to love in his later years, the lowest and highest registers, the grave sweetness of bearded angels, shrill cherubs. The ineffable song is tossed and caught and echoed until the air is quivering with it, until it seems to vibrate through all space, until heaven and earth are full of the glory of God.

Romain Rolland once said that you do not know what things are real in art until you come to them in pain; sorrow is the touchstone.[1] I think it is true there are things in music one imagines would be full of comfort and healing, and then, if the actual need comes, one can't stick them. This last movement of Beethoven's last Sonata is one of the rare things I know that can stand the test. (A certain Sonata of Schubert's is another.) Its art is pure of artifice. And the sound of it is so like 'the traffic of Jacob's ladder'. We may come to it, when so sad we could not sadder, and find it does not, like most of the beauty of the world, ring hollow under the touch of pain.

4

The first rush took me all over these late sonatas, and bit by bit, in the following months and years, they yielded

[1] 'La musique lui était devenue impossible. On ne juge bien de l'art que par le malheur. Le malheur est la pierre de touche. Alors seulement, on connaît ceux qui traversent les siècles, ceux qui sont plus forts que la mort. Bien peu résistent. On est frappé de la médiocrité de certaines âmes sur lesquelles on comptait . . . Comme la beauté du monde sonne creux sous le doigt de la douleur!'—*Le Buisson ardent*.

me what I have tried to set down. In the meantime I was also working backwards from the advanced point where I had got a footing, discovering the familiar. Even those very works, or similar ones, which I had scorned as the type of all that was pedestrian in music I began to enjoy enormously. I was able to identify one reason for this new-found zest. Take the dictum that a work of art has a beginning, a middle, and an end. I had been alive to the significance of beginnings and endings, but I had never realized any special function in the central term except to fill the gap between the first and the last. Now I was getting sometimes a feeling of a new kind, an exhilarating sense of the drive of development, of being at a particular moment in the thick of it, the music growing out of what had gone before and reaching forward to what was to come. Let me quote a few bars from the first movement of the Opus 10[3] Sonata, though it is only when they are in their context that you feel the full throb of vitality in them:

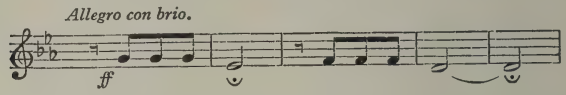
A section of music is well called a *movement* when it is like this one. The four-note figure has the eager energy

of some unit of life seen under a microscope, rushing into new combinations, perpetuating itself, transforming itself, an epitome of the torrent of vitality that pours through the world of matter.

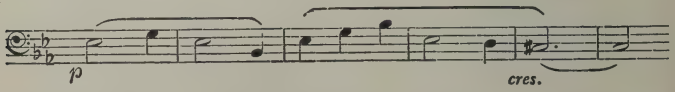
The main thing, however, was just that I had got to know Beethoven. Formerly, I did not know him; now I could feel and know himself through all his music. What was he like? One might be asked that just as one might be asked it about some great man one had been privileged to meet for a while. I think it is a good question. It may be the hardest of all to answer, but it is the sort that would keep music criticism to the centre point of its job, which it spends most of its time evading. I have a hazy memory of an incident Mr. Chesterton relates as a parable. Some people, after a performance of *Hamlet*, were hard at it, airing theories and notions of the sort that this play is so apt to set going. There was some one not quite of their own order, perhaps a child, perhaps a servant-maid, who had also been present. One of them suddenly asked her what she had thought of it. She said she thought it was a very sad play. There was a silence. Now I am afraid I shall want to throw out some ideas of the sort likely to interest those intellectuals, if they had been discussing Beethoven instead of Shakespeare. But I shall take the parable to heart and try not to overleap first and biggest things about his music. I shall at any rate start with one or two of the most immediate impressions that some one simple and artless might receive, though on each point I may get in a bit deep in the course of discussing it.

If I were asked what Beethoven is like I think I would mention three characteristics or aspects. First, something grim about him. 'Oh, yes,' every one who knows him would agree at once. We inevitably picture him seated, say,

at the key-board, brows bent, chin sunk, lips compressed. Yet here's a curious thing: if we were asked to mention a work, even a movement, that illustrates this grimness we should find very, very few to choose from. Exclude the C minor Symphony, the opening of which every one would put forward as the motto-theme of his grimness:



—exclude that, and we should find ourselves conning in our minds sonatas, symphonies, quartets, and having great difficulty and uncertainty in mentioning as many as two or three movements that could fairly be given this description. As cheerfulness and geniality kept breaking in everywhere we might end by confessing, surprised, that it would be easier to justify that old lunatic remark of mine that Beethoven's music was always happy, than a statement that it was characterized by grimness. The explanation is, I think, that, though the general distributed effect of the music is very rarely grim, we can feel that quality behind, in the composer. It is never very far away. It may break through anywhere, for a concentrated second or two. What could be more buoyant than the start of the *Eroica* Symphony, but it has not travelled half a dozen bars before we feel it graze the rock:



That sudden C sharp, just when we are so happily and comfortably ensconced in the key, is the iron touch that is absolutely typical of Beethoven. He is formidable. If we forget it there comes a grim reminder.

We are aware of this nature of the man also indirectly, from his handling of his material. He reveals it by his brevity and concentration; by energies held in, not with a view to a cheap explosion, but escaping as through a crack, as if in spite of himself; by the impatience and terseness which make the phrases come faster and faster and more and more compressed.

We can stop there, with grimness a feature of our portrait of Beethoven, or we can grope a little further. What is he confronting to make him look grim? We might talk about 'a tragic sense of life', but Beethoven's outlook was not ultimately dark, like, for example, Shakespeare's. On the other hand he could not take and use it lightly, as Shakespeare does his in his happiest stuff. Shakespeare slips a shadow into his songs, 'merry-come-sad', as the Irish say; cypress, golden lads and lasses gone to dust—turn your face away from it, 'Then come kiss me sweet and twenty'. Beethoven is harder, his hand heavier. His reminders are grim because there is menace in them, he takes the little people playing on the surface and gives them a shake over the pit; or because they are big with mystery, awesome mystery, instead of gentle melancholy.

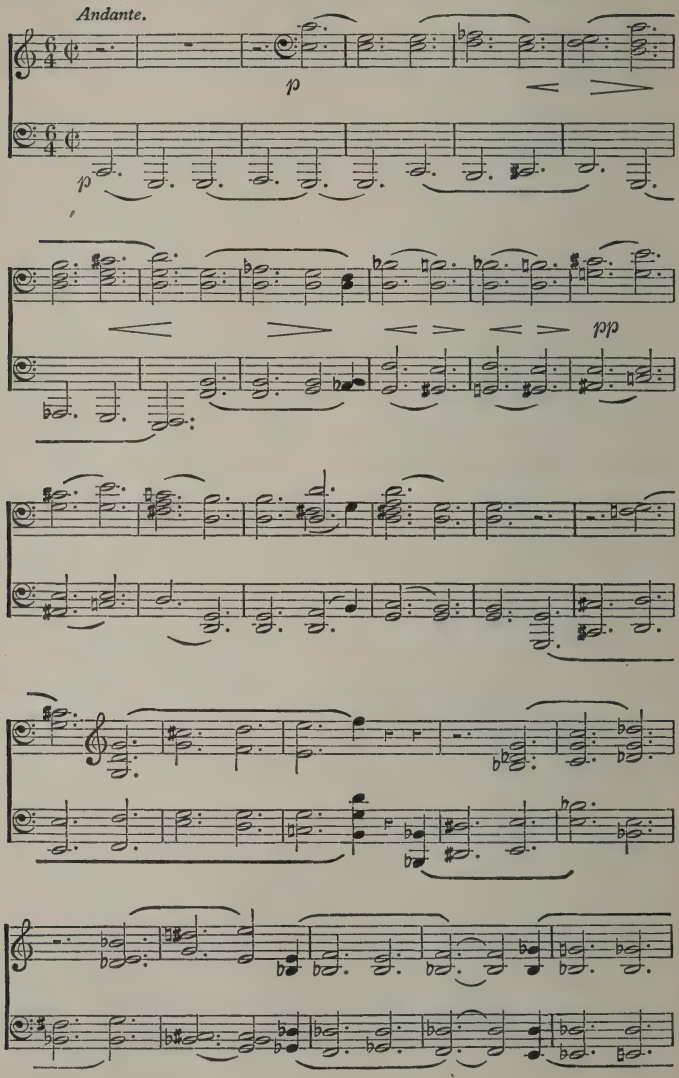
Shakespeare having been mentioned, this may be noted also, that, just as Shakespeare took over the convention that there should be a fool in the cast of the play, but could lift the part in his scheme and make it even one of tragic significance, so Beethoven took over the convention of a Minuet or Scherzo in the Sonata or Symphony, and could make it, instead of a bit of light relief, the vehicle even of his grimness. Think of the Scherzo of the C minor Symphony. It retains something of what we might recognize as a scherzo-character. It is not so direct in our faces as the first movement, more as if it were being seen obliquely

or at a distance. But I should be prepared to say downright, here is the highest-tension part of the whole symphony. Long ago Berlioz likened the effect at one point to the gambols of a frolicsome elephant, a comparison which has never been allowed to rest. Writers of programme-notes are for ever quoting it. (It would not be so bad, and it is only fair to Berlioz to say so, if they quoted the whole passage.) I suppose such a comparison would never have been made, far less perpetuated appreciatively, had this not been a Scherzo. But what a wonderful and terrible Scherzo! Instead of gambolling elephants think rather of how it comes in with a shadowy bound like a black panther. Of how its main theme, which is the opening theme of the Symphony narrowed to a spear, drives through the middle air. The trio, with its change of theme and motion, broadens out the feeling, so that we are no longer on edge, but it brings no real relaxing. In the second strain the false starts of the 'cellos and bass viols going their very hardest may be like a heavy trampling and stumbling, but the feeling is not humorous, it is nearer to horror, and the music rushes up to something wide-eyed like panic. Then the return of the Scherzo, a ghost of itself, with much *pianissimo* and *pizzicato*, growing more and more still and mysterious. Presently just the drums tapping, against that soft long-drawn chord, first in the rhythm of three shorts and a long, then in broken rhythm, then with steady menace. A faint shadow of the opening theme slides in and dances like a phantom on light fantastic toe. Oh, but it's grisly! When Schumann was listening to it once a little boy beside him pressed tight against him. 'What 's the matter?' said Schumann. The boy said 'I'm frightened'. From the first note to the last that Scherzo knows its own business as do rare few things

in music, and it doesn't stand there, between the rather formal slow movement and the very obvious finale, for light relief.

We do not look for grimness in the slow movements. Sometimes the strong march of the chords may sound formidable, but it is never hostile. There is, however, one short piece of slow music which is charged with the feeling of darkness and mystery like nothing else in Beethoven. It is Variation No. 20 in the 'Thirty-three Variations on a Valse of Diabelli', a late work (Opus 120) whose origin is interesting. Diabelli was a music-publisher in Vienna who organized a sort of symposium, asking the leading composers (Schubert being one) to contribute each a variation on a valse composed by himself. Beethoven's contribution never turned up. Instead, he offered Diabelli this mighty set of thirty-three. It is like a Beethoven manifesto. It starts off, after the statement of the theme (which he despised), in his grandest style, self-conscious mastery all over it—making them sit up. And here and there again in the course of it there is a suspicion of lording it, majestic purple. But there is almost everything else of Beethoven to be found in it too, even, towards the end, some of his quiet wandering reveries, the world forgot. Variation 20 is easily the strangest thing to find in a work so conceived. We come on it like the mouth of a pit, or one of those black little pools reputed bottomless, and almost feel we have fallen through. It is short, and less known, and perhaps less accessible, than most of the music I refer to, so I quote it entire on page 94. It is like a creeping darkness on the face of the waters.

In exuberant music, such as we usually get in last movements, grimness often shows itself. The outstanding instance is once again in the 'C Minor', where the main


Andante.
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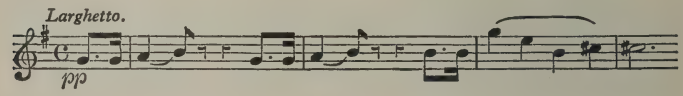
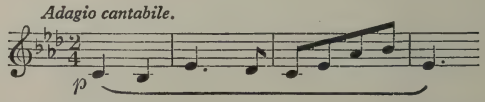
theme of the Scherzo re-enters in the middle of the jubilant finale. That is a large and emphatic effect. For an icy minute the grim reminder has the stage all to itself. In other cases it just slips in, a momentary iron touch, or a touch of mystery like the lifting of the edge of a curtain. It has passed almost before we know, but 'enough for fifty fears to rap and knock and enter in our soul'. I once went into a small room at night, switched on the light, and was rummaging in a trunk. Out of the corner of my eye I seemed to see something unusual on the wall beside me. As the strangeness of it came home to me it drew my eyes direct and my attention went rushing up to full. There was a square black picture hanging on the wall, framed like any other picture, but all dead black. I only saw it for an instant like that, and then realized I was looking at space. The black picture was an open window. But how queer, then, to think that the wild dark of infinity had been, if only for a split second, pinned on the wall inside that little room! That incident was in the exact pattern of an effect Beethoven sometimes made me feel. Just in the gayest, most direct sort of music—there you are, sitting in the familiar room, lights on, piano going; and a moment later there you are still, but slightly shaken. What was that? So vast, so close. You almost brush your hand across your eyes.

Secondly, I or any one trying to describe what Beethoven is like would have to speak of the sublime. That is probably

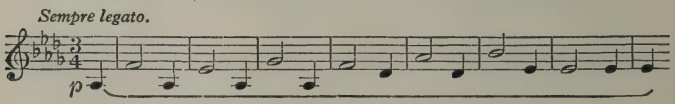
as good a word as any to describe the general aspect of him we get in the slow movements. We see the same man, eyes lifted up, spirit softened, feeling after some sort of union with the eternal, the unchanging. In this mood he is sometimes declaring a message from above, like a revelation, sometimes reaching up from below, from the human side, either with strong, climbing aspiration, as in the B flat Trio and so many of the slow movements, or as if he could see a heavenly joy into whose bosom he would fly and find a blessed peace, e.g. (from the Violin Concerto):



He is not grim any more, though perhaps self-conscious strength still manifests itself in the massive chords of a typical movement like that in the *Appassionata*. All that is left of his wrestling works out in a strong upward pressure of desire or aspiration, of which more will be said later on. If he remembers the little people at all it is in no mood to shake them over the pit, but with kindness that would comfort and gather them. This feeling of great-hearted kindness and consolation is connected in my mind with an undulating melody-motion, as in the *Pathétique* Sonata:



or the Trio of the Scherzo of the Opus 26 Sonata:



I link up with these the oboe tune in the *Eroica* Funeral March, quoted on page 7. Most of the slow movements are solitary, cloistral, but a few, like these, seem to have social feeling, as if Beethoven were holding men and women in his thought with great pity and kindness.

Various slow movements have had, and will have, so much individual attention that perhaps there is no need to say more here.

The third characteristic I want to discuss is hard to specify except negatively. I have spoken of Beethoven's grim touches and his sublime moods, and previously I have paid tribute to the sense of vastness in his music and his sacred rages and other features, but it dawns on me that I have been picking out, like plums, just the most striking and memorable movements or moments in his work. Now you don't give a faithful account of what a man is like by picking out the high spots. At any rate you don't in Beethoven's case. A picture of Beethoven that showed only what he was like at his most awe-inspiring moments would be misleading. As a matter of fact I think that is just how most accounts of him do go wrong. The temptation to do it is understandable, because naturally those moments make the best copy. But the result is a portrait which simply does not tally with the ordinary man's impression when he hears Beethoven being played. There was myself, for example, in the old days. If you took the general run of the Piano Sonatas, say, it seemed to me you got conventional, fairly obvious music of a cheerful sort. I could not fit the hushed tones in which people spoke about him as a giant, as a rebel, as almost divine, with the prevailing bread-and-butter qualities of his music. Of course, I was blind as a bat. But I think we have to take care not to go

colour-blind in the opposite way and see Beethoven only as a wizard controlling the storm or as a mystic in a trance.

So I now deliberately put down 'cheerfulness' as one of the major characteristics of Beethoven. And I am quite prepared to lump in with it, obviousness, noisy joviality, rather superficial gaiety, and the whole bundle of qualities at which I used to stick up my nose.

Perhaps you will think it doesn't promise to be very interesting to leave the rugged crags and the dark mysterious caverns and the soaring peaks and descend to the cheerful level fields between them and around them. But, as it happens, this quality can do something in the mountain line itself. It is not merely a background thing, not merely a sort of general sane and healthy constitution running through Beethoven's work. Sometimes he took it and emphasized it and exalted it, and put every atom of weight he had behind the statement of it. Our best chance of understanding it is to study it in these glorifications, that is to say, in some of the finales. After Beethoven has shown himself grim and formidable, after he has been 'soulful', he determinedly writes in another vein, particularly in those works that have the full weight of himself behind them. We get last movements that are almost aggressively gay, like those of the 'Emperor' Concerto and the Violin Concerto, or clamorously jubilant as in the Fifth Symphony, or gigantically burly and jovial as in the Seventh Symphony, or explicit and declaratory in praise of joy, as in the 'Ninth'.

It was traditional that a sonata or a symphony should end in a merry piece. But Beethoven did more than accept the custom; he embraced it; he emphasized it possibly to the injury of some of his greatest works. It is a last movement of this sort that, in case after case, has been judged to be the weakest link in the effect of the whole. It may

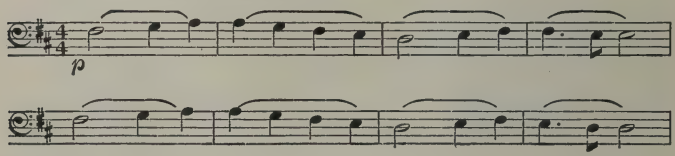
get itself disliked at the start by the way it arrives, wrenching us away too violently from pensive and delicate fancies. It may go on far too long, till we begin to be bored; in the finale of the 'C Minor' the idea sometimes comes that the conductor might as well drop his baton, and turn round and say to us, 'Etcetera'. Enough said. All forces having been gathered and let go in that colossally joyful outburst, we know the rest without being told. Beethoven seems to be insistent even against his instinct of artistic effect, far more sensitive than ours. And insistent, we might dare to say (going for a moment behind the music), against his own natural disposition. It was not natural and irresistible to him to take a jovial or light-hearted view of life. It is not the kind of outlook we expect him to come back to as a normal point of rest.

It is not merely that there is a boisterous element in Beethoven—there certainly is—but he is asserting it, forcing himself and forcing the music, which makes it far more significant. In my own puzzling over it I found illumination in a remark of Dr. Donald Tovey's in some very fine notes he wrote on the Ninth Symphony. He said this, or something like it: 'Beethoven was not content to let his music "fade into the light of common day".' That made clear all at once what I had been feeling after myself. It was not the 'common day' Beethoven objected to, it was the 'fading'. He violently rejected the idea that to come back to the ordinary life-level was a descent. Some central force in him, conscious or unconscious, was determined that his art should be real, and not mere fantasy-stuff. He has the power to transport us; he can be grim and open a gulf beneath our feet; he can be the mystic and lift us into communion with the eternal. But he will not leave us dreaming with the angels

in heaven above nor trembling among the demons down under the sea. His job is not complete. He has to bring us back to the surface of the earth we live on. That is a necessity; and he is not going to admit that it is a regrettable necessity. There will be nothing furtive about it, and nobody is going to be allowed to sigh or feel reluctance. It is almost funny in some of his works how ruthlessly he cuts off the trailing clouds of glory. Beethoven (if I am not audaciously pretending to creep inside his skin) had to compose a finale for many of his biggest works that would fulfil two conditions. First, it must blaze, instead of fade. Second, it must have an earthly radiance—it must blaze, so to speak, with common daylight.

Hence the fact that these last movements have a sort of surface brightness, or a rude muscular vigour, or some solid-earthy quality. If in some cases a hearer uses adjectives like 'shallow' or 'obvious', or sometimes perhaps even 'vulgar', he is recognizing the very character Beethoven intentionally imparted to them. They must not be profound; they must not be exalted; yet neither must they be modest and unassertive.

In the finale of the Ninth Symphony Beethoven gives almost an exposition of his aim. The orchestra actually quotes, one by one, the previous movements and rejects them all. Something different is wanted now. It appears, and it is a very great tune, and to a unique degree the feature of its greatness is the sense it gives that its feet are planted solid on the ground.



With the tune comes the choir, that is, flesh-and-blood men and women; and the words they sing are Schiller's 'Ode to Joy'. I know musicians are critical of the movement; the reasons are above my head, because the actual effect of a fine performance is glorious to me, yet never gets far away from the *non Angeli sed Angli*[1] effect which Beethoven was declaredly seeking.

In the 'C Minor' the purpose is almost as ostentatious. The music celebrates, like people pulling the bells out of the steeples. Trombones lend their aid—the first time Beethoven had resorted to them. The celebrations are long kept up, to be adequate; and, what makes the purpose very plain, when the movement has reached its end Beethoven does not stop, he goes on, just as a man who has been playing a piece to himself and come to a triumphant conclusion goes on, repeating the tonic chord all up and down the piano. It is not music that will wear indefinitely without tediousness beginning to show, and being where it is it naturally gets a lot of wear. I suppose that is Beethoven's failure. It is not much use making a demonstration if he is not able to hold his hearers. We can only remember the exceedingly difficult thing he was set on achieving—to bring the curve of the music right back to common earth without letting it descend. Easy to break off in the air; easy to work a fade-out; but hard to make the music rise and swell as it merges with everyday reality.

If we think it out far enough I believe we shall discover that Beethoven was throwing himself against an inherent limitation in the art of music. Look at this saying of Leonardo da Vinci I found in an English translation of his Note-books: 'Music has two ills, the one mortal, the

[1] I think the Suffragettes were first responsible for this inversion.

other wasting. The mortal is ever allied with the instant which follows that of the music's utterance, the wasting ill lies in its repetition, making it seem contemptible and mean.' To put it bluntly: Music must either go on or stop. Every time a great piece of music ends, in the instant which follows, you are overshadowed by the mortal ill to which music is subject. A picture has not to stop, but music, which has its being in time, must come to an end and be no more. The only alternative would be for it to go on and on, becoming more and more attenuated in substance, or wearisome through repetition—the wasting ill. One might say, there is a right way for every piece of music to be born; there is a right way for it to develop; but there is no way by which any musical work can be completed, always we must feel that it has died or that it is in decay.

These are deep waters, friends, but even those, like me, who can't stay under very long may get a dim and wavering sight of Beethoven and that sonata-form of his in astonishing wrestling with life and reality. We have a right to say the last movements of all the great symphonies (third, fifth, seventh, ninth) and of other of his grandest enterprises are comparatively inferior music, if we think so. Yet we ought to wonder a little at such an extremely queer coincidence. And the fluency of our criticism might dry up a little if we got an inkling that failure here may be the token of a composer striving to overcome an ultimate limitation of the art itself, which hardly another man of them has even sighted.

However this may be, there is no doubt about the main characteristic I set out to describe. Beethoven wanted his art to express a joyful acceptance of life. He couldn't quite manage it in his own personal life, but all the more he

insisted on it in his music. The light he valued highest was the light of common day. He glorified it at special times with all possible emphasis. And let us remember that what he is exalting and proclaiming at such times is an element that runs through all his work. Cheerful common daylight was the medium with which he mixed his colours. Hence the unique solidity and power of his art. If it were not for the strength of common daylight in Beethoven's music his heroic and sublime flights would be far out-topped by Wagner and half a dozen lesser composers.

5

That was the chirp of Ariel
  You heard as overhead it flew,
The farther going more to dwell,
  And wing our green to wed our blue;
But whether note of joy or knell,
  Not his own Father-singer knew;
Nor yet can any mortal tell,
  Save only how it shivers through;
The breast of us a sounded shell,
  The blood of us a lighted dew.

I am coming to the very top, now, of my musical climbing. It is a narrow one, far away from the ground; the air is going to be rarefied. Feeling a bit daunted at the work ahead, and ready to grasp at any help, I have put that small poem in the forefront. George Meredith wrote it. No doubt it seems obscure when you cast your eye over it, but look at it for a little while, and the light of it will shine out. It describes the rare breath of supernatural expression that may come from a work of art. We feel it for a moment in the air, and it has gone. To

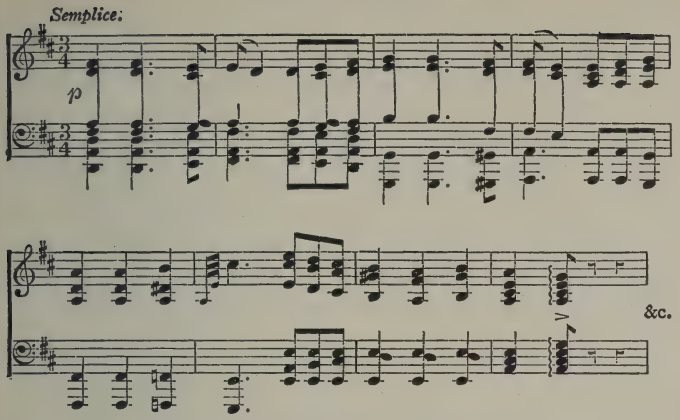
copy the most brilliant of advertisements, 'That's the chirp of Ariel—that was'. It so transcends the ordinary range of emotion that the artist himself could not have told whether it was joy or sadness he felt, and all we know is that it shivers through us, and lifts our earthly mortality into union with the blue of the infinite.

In any kind of art we might catch ourselves saying, 'That was the chirp of Ariel'. But Meredith describes it in terms of music, and there Beethoven, I believe, is the Father-singer who gives us the most wonderful experience of it.

That is my best introduction to the quality of certain passages in which Beethoven seems to go fey. They may be the merest fragments, only a few bars long; but size, or completeness, has no relevance to their virtue. Nor has beauty, even. You can get beyond beauty, just as in morals you can get 'beyond good and evil'. Sometimes we shall decidedly be able to judge 'whether sound of joy or knell', sometimes not even that. Nearly all our categories will be left behind. All we may be able to say at first, and there may not be so very much more that can be said ultimately, is that this music is different.

Let us establish that much to start with. The example I will name first is the one which gives the listener the strongest sensation of having broken away from ordinary music altogether. It occurs in the Pianoforte Trio in B flat, Opus 97. No one who knows the passage will charge me with over-statement. There is no other case in which the transition is so sudden and magical.

The *Andante cantabile* of this Trio is a set of variations on a theme so beautiful and so full of deep desire that it may be reckoned very nearly, if not quite, Beethoven's greatest:



The variations that follow make lovely meditation on this theme. Then comes its simple repetition, *piano*, with new harmonies, strange and halting. We never hear it end. Just on the last chord something happens. It has gone; the whole foreground has disappeared; the solid earth has vanished; we are afloat among soft billows of sound, and permeated, as through some more immediate *rapport* than physical hearing, by the murmur of an endless song.

'The fifth variation', says Dr. Walker, 'passes with a kind of faltering awe into a coda of an unearthly purity hardly matched elsewhere even by Beethoven.'[1] I don't think any one can help feeling something like a translation of the spirit when the shift comes. It arrives as gently as the moment of falling asleep, but brings as complete a transition from waking world to dreamland. Or, to put it the other way round, perhaps it is our ordinary world that slides away like the scenery of a dream, and we wake up to the reality of a world invisible surrounding us.

[1] Ernest Walker, *Beethoven*.

Close on the heels of this enchantment the finale of the Trio arrives to do its job, that job which I have already discussed. Never are we so likely to shrink and resent it. But Beethoven is making no concessions. There is indeed a sort of extra callousness about the music that makes us suspect it is put on, and that Beethoven himself on this occasion was finding it harder than any one.

The B flat Trio is not classified in Beethoven's 'third period', but it is on the verge of it chronologically and technically. And it is only in a few of the third-period works that we come again on passages akin to the coda of the Opus 97 *Andante*. I shall deal with three of them. But first let us consider what it means to speak of 'the third period'.

The division of Beethoven's creative life into three periods is universally accepted. It does not rest only on technical analysis; it is real enough to make itself felt by the ordinary listener like myself. That is to say, when he hears or thinks of any work that has individuality he is conscious not only of Beethoven behind it, but of Beethoven in one of the three stages of his development. Perhaps the divisions are not absolutely clear-cut for the expert who considers all the music; but the more memorable works belong decidedly to their period with only one or two exceptions, e.g. the *Largo e mesto* of the D major Sonata, Opus 10[3], is a wonder to belong to the first period. But then it would be a wonder wherever we found it. Sombre and pitiful, full of power, it is almost the most effective slow movement Beethoven wrote, but it associates itself, in my mind, with nothing else he ever did.[1] The *Adagio molto e mesto* of the first Rasoumowsky Quartet, Opus 59[1], is a more pointed exception, the only really

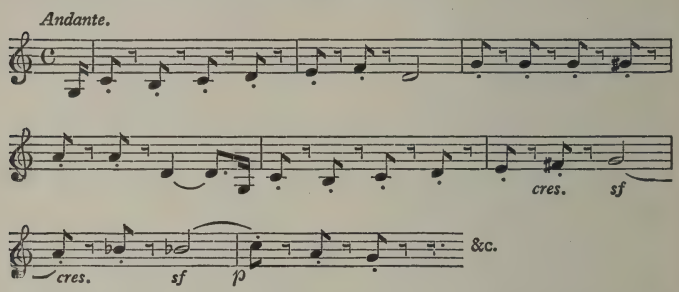
[1] Unless there be a distant kinship with the short *Adagio* of the Violoncello Sonata in D, Opus 102[2].

striking one in the music I know at all well. It seems to me to have all the spiritual characteristics of the last period. Apart from these (and there may be one or two more I am not aware of) Beethoven's work is on three successive levels.

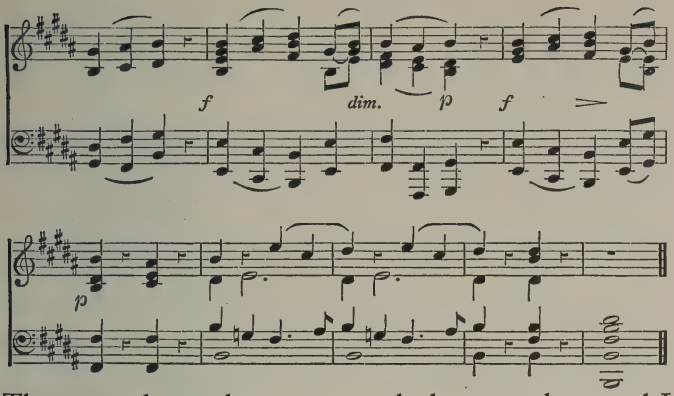
The development follows a pattern which is probably the usual, almost the inevitable, course of development of the greatest creative artists, but it is clearer in Beethoven's case than in any other. No such artist starts from the ground. He can only happen when his art, through preceding generations, has reached a certain stage of evolution. Thus Beethoven found existing a kingdom of music. He assimilated its laws and language and achievements. They were more external to him than to one like Mozart, who seems almost born with the kingdom within him. He begins to make his own contribution. His own personal force begins to flow out in terms of the citizenship which he has accepted. On this footing a composer may find his perfect fulfilment, as perhaps Mozart did (all his development in seriousness was just an ordinary growing-up), and there is no limit to the enrichment of the kingdom he may effect. But Beethoven was one who could not find his freedom and fulfilment on this level. In the first period the kingdom remains an external kingdom; some of himself could flow out harmoniously enough, some find constrained outlet, some was locked up.

In the second period Beethoven has become absolute monarch of his kingdom. More than that—*L'État, c'est moi.* What he feels within can be poured out as music; what he pours out as music is what he feels within. To bring in a new metaphor, he has found a state of resonance, a tremendous thing to happen in art or in any other sphere of life. I expect a golfer experiences it in a minute way

when he discovers how to hit a ball full lick, with the sweetness of full effect and full control, or a singer when he finds out how to produce his voice, and a thread of breath will do a giant's work. It brings, in Beethoven, an immense accession of power. Here is an illustration which I think will make any one feel the release of power in Beethoven in this period of resonance. Take the theme of the variations in Sonata Opus 14[2] (first period). It is so well known that I need only quote it in single notes:



Now consider the theme of the slow movement in the 'Emperor' Concerto (second period):

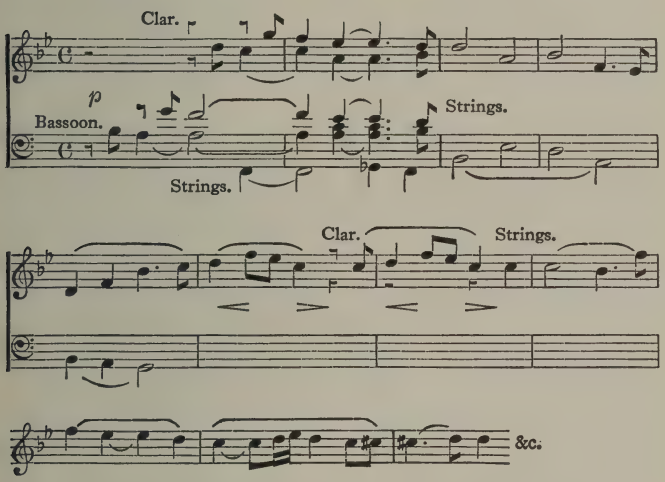


These two themes have very much the same shape and I should think grew from the same seed. The first is charming, and utterly Beethovenish; there could never be a doubt about that. But the second is to the first like an oak to an anemone. Of course, at any particular moment the composer might want an anemone and not an oak. The first tune might conceivably have been written in the second period if it had happened to fill the bill. But the point is that the second could not in any case have been written in the first period. It comes from a Beethoven who held music in the hollow of his hand. It belongs to the period of resonance, when the whole kingdom of music was responsive, and reacted on the given idea and was reacted on again by it, and so on till the power is built up almost *ad infinitum*. Open the top of your piano and try playing it full instead of softly, if you doubt me. We can be pleased with the sonata-tune and satisfied with it, yet all the time 'these are but the outskirts of his ways and how small a whisper do we hear of him'. We realize it when his art shifts to a new level and the 'thunder of his power' begins to come through.

Then this stage, too, passes. The period of *L'État c'est moi* breaks up. He abandons the throne. It is hardly believable, but that is what he does. He abandons the throne on which he was absolute monarch, and becomes a pilgrim, a hermit, a dry scholastic sometimes, or sometimes a seer and mystic.

Yet this is not decline. If he has lost resonance it is not because he cannot sustain it but because he is seeking some greater thing. Power is there and can make itself felt more than ever. But what we miss is the sense of mastery, the attitude of 'hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed'. It fails, sometimes, in the stormy movements. Though there are bursts of surpassing splendour, they are not held long on the resonance level, and groping and uncertainty appear instead of the old inevitability. There is titanic vitality that can give us things like the Scherzo of the 'Ninth', or that of the Hammerklavier Sonata, but in other places it runs rough and wild, and his characteristic impetuosity has intensified into restlessness and brusquerie. Still more we miss the sense of mastery in the slow movements (we get no more themes of the type of that just quoted from the 'Emperor' Concerto). It is displaced in several different ways. There is a reaching after intimacy which is all against rhetoric. There is an indifference to effect which may amount to complete forgetfulness of any audience. There is an 'exploring' quality in much of the music, it may be a mere dry experimenting, not of very much interest probably even to himself, or it may be a fascinating kind of wandering in untrodden country that we get in small things like the late Bagatelles, or in long slow movements. The effect of it is that we are as far as possible from feeling that the composer's foot is on his native heath and his name is Beethoven; we feel he

knows no more than we what little natural bit that is curious or lovely the next step may reveal. Finally, and as the essence of the change, mastery is displaced by something bigger—humility. That is the quality of the high moments now. Not the strong hand, but fingers feeling as gently as a child's at a closed door, which once and again opens and lets in fragments of miraculous vision and song. Think, for example, of how the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony begins:



It may be interesting to remind readers that a very similar development pattern has been traced in Shakespeare. Professor Bradley divided his work also, the tragedies at least, into periods of almost exactly the same characteristics, up to a point. 'In *Cæsar* and *Hamlet*', he says (these being middle-period plays), 'the honey-tongued sweetness of Shakespeare's earlier writing remains; the ease and lucidity remain; but there is an accession of weight

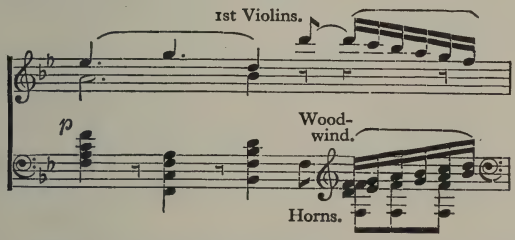
and force. *Julius Cæsar* is the culmination.' At this point Shakespeare reached what Bradley calls 'a limited perfection'. 'Neither thought nor expression seems to have any tendency to outrun or contend with its fellow. We receive an impression of easy mastery and complete harmony.' That is exactly true of Beethoven in his prime. 'After *Hamlet*', he goes on (having in mind *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*), 'the style in the more emotional passages is heightened. It becomes grander, sometimes wilder, sometimes more swelling, even tumid. . . . It is not so easy and lucid, it is deficient in charm. . . . The more pervading effect of beauty gives place to what may almost be called explosions of sublimity and pathos.'

Thus they advanced, the great ones, pressing into reality along the line of their special genius. They come suddenly into full command of their powers. Their work becomes superb and flawless with a 'limited perfection'. They find a resonance between the inner world of thought and feeling and the outer world of expression. And then they lose it again. Not because they have passed their zenith. By every mark of energy and vision we know they are still pressing on. Is there a new perfection on a higher level somewhere beyond? If so, not one has got there. Their last work becomes uneven, marred in many ways. Beethoven's most of all. Much that is incomprehensible, much that is wildly capricious, much that is tentative; barren movements like the long finale that ruins, for ordinary purposes, Opus 106, which might have been *the* Hammerklavier Sonata, the greatest of all works for the piano. But the best now, and that best not small, is of a quality unknown before. And, over and above, as a by-product, or it may be the main product, though we should have to reckon it like radium in milligrams, those passages occur

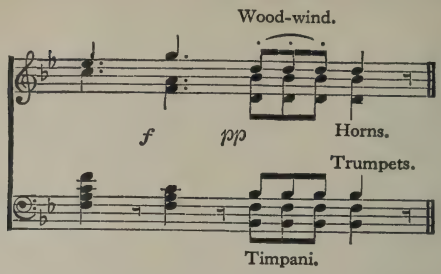
when the spirit of music seems to be set free from the ordinary conditions of birth and constraints of embodiment. They float up out of their context and leave it beneath them like artificial, man-made stuff.

These are the fragments of which I have mentioned one, and go on now to speak of three more, all in third-period works. Miracles of expression though they are, we ought not to think of them as divine accidents which might have happened at any period. Beethoven had to climb to the level on which they could happen. And, though they are gifts rather than achievements, a price had to be paid. In art, too, the right sort of merchant is ready to sacrifice goodly pearls for that which is priceless.

Once at least in the Ninth Symphony the music floats free. Not, as in the B flat Trio, by a sudden shift. The setting in this case is such that it happens naturally; the movement itself is on the borderland. With the first notes (see page 111) we feel that Beethoven is in the spirit, so noble is the music, so transparently pure, and of a tenderness that makes an intimacy past belief.[1] Again, what a rare shade of feeling comes at the close, not rare in life, but to capture in music—that lovely contentment that is yet left in the air, a little bit questioning:



[1] But I nearly wept with disappointment when I first heard it on the orchestra. Even now I'd like it to be about a quarter of a mile away,



I have seen it produce charmingly in others exactly what happens in me, a smile, and then a sigh; or the other way round. Even as I write it down I catch myself saying to myself, 'What lovely thoughts Beethoven had in his mind!'

But it is in the middle of the movement, in the passage which comes after the alternating subjects have both been repeated once in variation, that contact with the ground is imperceptibly broken, and the music is afloat:

It has a magical being that seems independent of human art. And the strangest part is that the magic does not come through any sensation of distance. It is not as if we were listening-in to some remote music of the spheres. It is the very intimacy pervading the whole movement that is sublimated. The music does not fly off into the blue. It hovers close to us in dear affection. I think of swallows, which are so swift and airy yet cleave to the homes of men.

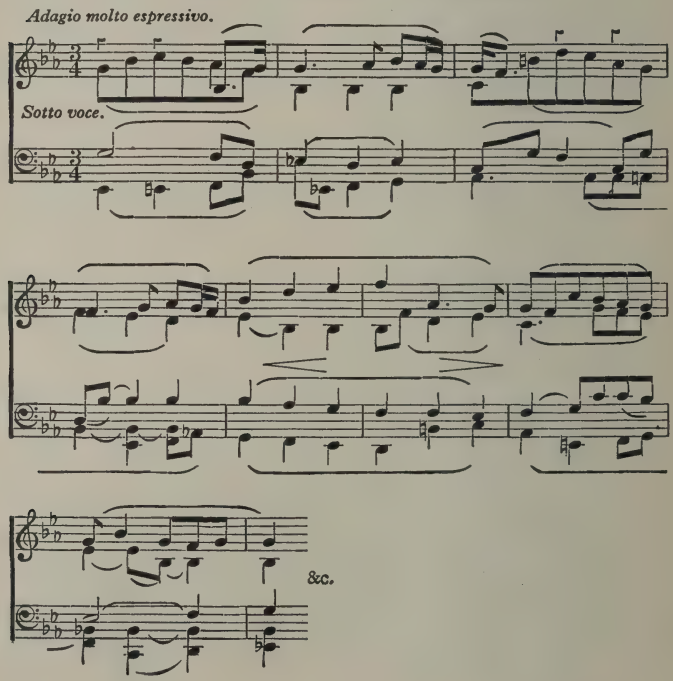
preferably up in the air. So much big soft brass can cloy and lose its magic in a close-up.

I declare they are the birds of Ariel. Shelley called a skylark a spirit only when it was at heaven or near it. He could never have denied the substantial birdhood of that *tenore robusto* if he had seen it near. Swallows are the blithe spirits, least earth-bound, and also, like this music, least remote. Their song, though it is only the dry ghost of a song, little more than the sound of rustling leaves, is sweet and reassuring. They put their homes on ours within hand-reach of us. And you remember how a child, lying awake in the night, heard sometimes their soft stir in the nest, and sleepy, sweetly-contented twitter. I shall have to take them away from Chopin. Their symbolism fits so well the chirp of Ariel as Beethoven makes us hear it, 'farther going more to dwell', that is to say, free of the infinite, yet using its freedom to come through the barriers of personality closer than breathing.

If I had been sternly economical of superlatives I might have had some language left against the moment of greatest need. But the exactions of a narrative that leads straight on from one outstanding musical experience to another have used up my resources over and over again. If there were any words left how freely would I lavish them now. One can only make the last plunge, and say that, if a single brief movement is qualified to wear the crown, it is before the Cavatina of the B flat Quartet, Opus 130, that all other music must bow the knee.

Though in many ways it stands by itself, the Cavatina is within the circle of this group, or else the group itself is meaningless. It has a section marked *Beklemmt*, which, with its floating fragments of unearthly song, directly recalls the type of the other passages that have been mentioned. It is not, however, this episode alone but the

whole movement that belongs complete to that order of music which is different from the rest. It is like no other music on that plane. We cannot call it free in the sense of formless; and there is no dimness that gives the feeling of a dream, there is no mistiness in its mystery; it is as clear-cut as crystal. Yet somehow it impresses us as being only the further beyond earthly limitations. In its very clarity lie the strangeness and intentness of the awe it creates. We hold our breath. That quiet, clear flow of music instantly makes for itself an atmosphere of breathless stillness. It has the still, small voice that is more awesome than storm, or fire, or earthquake. The theme is:



I think it is literally true of the Cavatina, 'whether sound of joy or knell, not his own Father-singer knew'. All that he did know, perhaps, was 'a man (whether in the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up into the third heaven—How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words.' I have read lately that it was written with tears. Beethoven confessed that 'nothing that he had written had so moved him; in fact, that merely to revive it afterwards in his thoughts and feelings brought forth renewed tributes of tears'.

It is quite outside my proper province to venture any suggestions that partake of the technical. With even a small thought of the comprehensive and microscopic study that has been given to Beethoven's themes—their inception and growth in the sketch-books, their comparative aspects—I fully realize that anything which has occurred to me is about as likely to be novel or helpful as, say, the observations of a schoolboy with a butterfly-net to the Entomological Section of the British Association. Yet with, I hope, the disarming *naïveté* of that schoolboy, I would mention what has seemed to me almost a characteristic of a few of Beethoven's greatest tunes. It arises out of the Cavatina, because there I seem to find it at last in its full-flower form.

What I have in mind is a strong, smooth, ascending impulse in the tune, beginning as a rule from the dominant, through three or four more or less consecutive steps of equal time value—usually one full beat to each—which upward movement is the heart of the tune, its moment of most intense life.

Look at the phrase 'B flat, D, E flat, F' in the fifth and sixth bars of the Cavatina theme quoted above. Note how every means of rhythm, and harmony, and melodic

preparation and sequel concentrate the emphasis upon it. Allow yourself to feel the effect, and analyse it. We speak of melodic curve, and every tune, of course, must rise and fall; but here there is what I would try to describe as a breaking upwards of the line of melody. Subsequent notes take up the thread, but they don't take up all the thread. We perceive that some virtue has gone out of the music; some of its content of feeling has poured upwards, and does not fall back to earth.

This is my perfect example; the nearest parallel to it is in the theme of the B flat Trio slow movement, quoted on p. 105—'A, A, B, C sharp', in almost exactly the same relative position in the tune, and climbing again through one bar to culminate on the initial accent of the next. Of this, most of what I have said is true in a lesser degree; but the fact that the downward fall of the tune, after the upward movement, happens to take off from a higher note, diminishes, without destroying, the characteristic effect, which, here too, is the theme's moment of intensest life.

After these examples the idea becomes, perhaps, an obsession in one's mind, and there is a tendency to find the ascending impulse, in a more or less incipient form, all through Beethoven's finest slow themes. Of those ready to hand, because already quoted, there is, for example, the theme from the Opus 109 Sonata (p. 75), with its emotional stress on the three even crotchets at the modulation (fourth bar) in the first part of the tune. And there is the great tune from the E flat Concerto (p. 108), pervaded throughout by that upward pressure (bars 3, 7, 8, 9, 11).

What I am claiming is a spiritual characteristic rather than a technical one—that there is a certain sort of feeling in Beethoven which is continually seeking expression in this

way. When we have seen its complete unveiling in the Cavatina, we are ready to recognize in that peculiar deep warmth, as of desire or aspiration, which characterizes so many of his themes, a groping after the full utterance, and are predisposed to identify the feature in many cases where the resemblance is of the slightest.

Technically, it has been pointed out that the typical Beethoven tune tends to move by consecutive steps of the scale ('conjunct motion') as against, say, the typical Brahms tune, which tends to move up and down the notes of a chord ('disjunct motion'). From that point of view this feature would seem to be no more than an inevitable by-product. But perhaps the spiritual characteristic rather accounts for the technical mannerism than vice versa. Is it not the upward motion that is most often in consecutive steps, and the downward that relaxes to drop easily through large intervals?

Really, however, this is out of my depth. There remains, at any rate, the unforgettable gesture of the Cavatina—and how lovely it is! how like a flower, lifting its face slowly to the sun, till, with one more supreme movement, it offers itself altogether, drinking in the light, and exhaling its sweetness upward! And for me it is like the finding at last of a word that Beethoven was trying all his life to think of.[1]

[1] The above attempt to define a characteristic feature of Beethoven's slow themes has been left word for word as in the original edition of this book. It may be mentioned that the suggestion had the honour of being taken up by Ernest Newman. The extended application of it is the chief concern of his book, *The Unconscious Beethoven*. Mr. Newman's description of the characteristic is practically identical: '. . . a figure of three ascending notes in conjunct motion, that generally come in about the same place relatively to the melodic design as a whole, and are unconsciously used to perform the same expressive function.' Again, 'he used it unconsciously as the culminating point in the expression of a musical idea that had associations of uplift, of tension, of

The only other piece of music I shall put with these is the *Adagio molto* of the A minor Quartet, Opus 132, the last complete work of Beethoven's to be composed. This movement, like the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony, is built up of alternations of two sections, an Adagio and an Andante; but the transitions are queerly abrupt, and the contrast is of the sharpest, the Adagio deeply subjective, the Andante vividly objective.

The Adagio section is written in the Lydian mode, a unique case in Beethoven, said, indeed, to be the only example in classical music of the consistent use of one of the old modes. It speaks in a language so strange that at first, and it may be for long, we feel that it is baffling, and feel nothing else. So, in the effort to understand a foreign tongue, we may miss not only the meaning of the words but all the plain expressiveness that speaks to our sympathetic insight. Yet as the strain to follow relaxes and we let the slow melody flow over us and the mysterious harmonies find their echo within, gradually the deeper affinities by which a man understands the things of a man are established between the spirit of the composer and our spirit, and the music, 'one of the most mysterious and elusive movements in existence', begins to yield up some of its message.

As an exception to what I have said above, this is a case in which the downward movement of the melodic line seems to carry most of the significance. What that may be it is hard to apprehend, and when some sort of union does come about between oneself and the music it is rather

yearning towards a height, of soaring resolution'. He also mentions 'one of Beethoven's weightiest uses of it', in the B flat Trio; the 'remarkable quadruple use of it in the *adagio* of the fifth piano concerto'; and finds the crowning example in the Cavatina.

deeper in than the place where words come from and things have names. As near as one word can come, *Peace*, it seems to me, is the burden of it, but in a special sense which 'tranquil' would not fit. It is a peace which is indescribably alive, full of light, full of some large glad energy of perception; 'in tune with the Infinite', the transatlantic phrase might be.

Then the music swings over to the Andante, whose outlook is radiant, a world in which the pulse of joy beats to a rapture, before the whole picture begins to blur and blend in a quiet inward warmth of happiness, leading to the return of the Adagio. Once again the Andante breaks in. Then comes the final variation of the Adagio, and with it has come at times for me one of the most strange and delicious of musical adventures.

Have you known what it is like to be lying half-awake, half-asleep, and to hear distant music that some one begins to play, hear it and lose it as consciousness ebbs and flows? In that state music can sound bewitching. Later you say, 'What was that wonderful thing you were playing this afternoon? Play it again.' . . . 'Oh, was that all!'

You remember how Coleridge tried to get his dream swiftly on paper before it faded. Could he but revive the symphony and song of that damsel with a dulcimer, every one who heard, he was sure, would be crying, Beware!

> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.

I wonder. Perhaps in sober daylight nobody would have noticed anything remarkable about it.

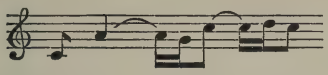
Heine once, in a dream, flung himself at the feet of the carven Goddess of Beauty, 'Hellenic calm possessed my

senses, and over my head, as in benediction, Apollo poured his sweetest strains.' But he awoke while the music still continued, and found it was the bells of cows being driven to pasture.

Myself, I had that kind of experience again and again. It was back in the golden age period, in the bits of it that really were golden, summer holidays in Scotland. I and another boy used to share a room. When we had planned some early morning ploy among beasts or birds or fishes we used to get hold of a little clock there was in the farm-house. Instead of the usual sort of alarum it was contrived to tinkle out a tune at the set time. I cannot think there was any magic in the tune itself; it was strange to me, and I don't believe I ever heard the clock play it in the daytime, but years later I found it was well known among men and called 'The Blue Bells of Scotland'. Nevertheless it used to bring me drifting up out of sleep till I lay just awash in the light of the new day, wondering in what strange world I had broken surface, for there was music in the air, music ineffably lovely and kind, stroking every little blissful nestling nerve. The other boy would be already awake, and sitting up with his hands clasped round his knees, quieter than usual, and letting me alone. I have since speculated whether for him too . . . just a few seconds in advance of me? Of course, one could not possibly speak about it.

Now in all the realm of music the only place where I have ever known in full waking consciousness something of the atmosphere and effect of this experience (evidently far from uncommon) is when the *Adagio molto* reaches its final variation. It does not always come off, and I don't know how or why it does come, except that all over and through this last page of the music is woven a little figure,

caught and echoed by each instrument in turn, entering and re-entering:



—a figure so slight that I almost shrink from quoting it in cold blood, when I have to confess that it is the only tangible token I can offer for the dizzy sense I have of an ineffable joy in which this strange piece of music culminates.

Further, would it be considered too fanciful to see in the title of this music a clue to an experience behind it not unlike that which it recalls to me listening? Beethoven wrote over this movement one of his rare titles—'A convalescent's sacred song of thanksgiving to the Divinity.' Is it possible that he knew, and was veritably trying to recreate, such an experience as I have had and you may have had? When is it so likely to occur as in the softness and dreaminess and deliciousness of convalescence, when one dozes and wakes again, or half-wakes; and the veiled beauty of common sounds becomes naked for one, and all things in the world appear lovely and lovable?

I am not quite satisfied to leave this music linked up with quasi-dreamlike states of consciousness. They come nearer than anything else one can appeal to, but they might seem to draw this last example, and the other wonderful passages I have grouped with it, into their own world of illusion and hypnosis. I have used them for their semblance but not for their substance. Sensations of surpassing beauty and joy may come to the man who is in a twilight of consciousness, who is passive through weakness or slumber, and whose critical powers are in suspense.

Even a drunken or drugged consciousness may find such a heaven. A state of feeling superficially like that of much of this music is indicated in a description a friend once gave me of his sensations as he walked along the street, 'I felt as if everybody in the world was doing exactly what I wanted him to do'. He was a medical student experimenting with drugs. That day he had dosed himself with Indian Hemp; and in the train he had to hold up his newspaper to conceal the benignant smile with which he couldn't help blessing mankind.

I suppose I have used the sub-normal to help me to describe the super-normal. But a sceptical person may say, 'Are they distinguishable? Is there, after all, any difference between them?' We are compelled to ask ourselves whether we have got any test of worth and reality to apply to these perceptions, so similar in sensation. How can we tell whether they come through a blurred consciousness, or one of supernatural clearness? I should say the test is, first, how they happen: whether we sink into them, or whether they are, not indeed achieved by striving, but found on a summit which has been achieved by striving, and by growing and suffering and learning, as were Beethoven's moments of vision, for himself, and, to some small extent, I think, for all who have ever shared them. And, second, validity: whether they are able to stand up to the rest of experience. One sort of vision breaks up, one sort of glow departs at the first touch of common sense. Apollo's lyre is a cow-bell or an alarum-clock; the gold is fairy-gold. But this music that wings our green to wed our blue has a meaning that abides. It is conceivable that it might change permanently the whole look of life. Even though we forget about it, it is there for us to remember and go back to again.

There are other experiences in life which also pass these tests and are truly akin to Beethoven's times of miraculous insight. One cannot appeal to them with such confidence that they will be recognized. But Tolstoy, for example, described one in *War and Peace*. An officer, a man of noble character, lies in a military hospital, mortally wounded. Near him is another wounded man whose face is familiar, but in his faintness he cannot identify it. Every now and then, among the fantasies of his fever, there would come intervals when his thoughts had a clearness and depth that they had never had in a normal state. In one such period he knows the man beside him, whose red eyes are fixed on his. It is his enemy, a fellow officer who had robbed him of his wife and whom he had lived to kill. 'He remembered everything, and tender pitifulness rose up in his heart which was full of peace. . . . "Yes," he said to himself, "this is the pity, the charity, the love of my neighbour, the love of those that hate us as well as of those who love us, which God preached on earth. . . . This was what I had yet to learn in this life, and what makes me regret it." '

There is the scene, too, in Romain Rolland's musical novel, which shows us Jean Christophe lying in the garret where he has drudged at hack-work and spent himself in the travail of creation, starved, and finally struggled through a bad illness. The window is open and the sound comes in of some small girl thumping out her Mozart. Instead of infuriating him, it starts within him a strange wave of feeling, a great patience, a tenderness for all little, incompetent things. There and then he knows something: he has not sufficiently loved.

That is only fiction, and nothing like so weighty at that as the previous quotation, but I mention it particularly

because I think no one can become intimate with Beethoven without feeling that, in one way or another, this thing happened in fact. We only know it by its fruit, but are none the less sure that the time came when that grand, yet all-too-human spirit, self-tormented, lonely, shut out from the sound of his own music, told himself, 'I have not sufficiently loved'.

There is love in much of his late work, sonatas especially. But in the fragments that have been the subject of this chapter its presence is both brightest and strangest. All of them except the Cavatina, and yet perhaps the Cavatina too, have that combination of remoteness and intimacy which I spoke about when we were looking at the magical bit in the *Adagio* of the Ninth Symphony. They seem to belong to another plane and yet are infinitely closer and kinder than anything we know on the plane on which we live.

I wonder if that is where Beethoven is unique among the few in all art who are his peers. I do not assert it, because I have not the assurance of insight into any other of the three or four lordly ones that I have, within limits, about Beethoven. But I offer the surmise, to have it tried out.

Beethoven has not a monopoly of 'the chirp of Ariel'. In other arts, too, those flashes are struck out, those ultra-rays that seem to come from the primal stuff of music or poetry or vision in colour or form. But, to make one wild shot at what I mean, sometimes the significance of words or colour or form goes out into the ultra-violet, but perhaps only music, only Beethoven's music, has reached into the ultra-red. Beethoven, when the rare moment arrives, goes off the visible spectrum at the end at which other art tends to become more and more earth-bound.

When through a voice of words or through a touch

bestowed of hand or brush there has passed over us as we read or gazed the breath of the inexpressible thing, it has been travelling away from what is warm and intimate and human. It has made us feel a hunger. The quality of it was the quality of the world at dawn. Like the world I used to go out to sometimes long ago, on a morning when the alarum clock had done its work, so wide, so still (at least every sound so pure), so bright and tenuous. I never was a poetical youngster, but I swear I felt as if a presence had just withdrawn. The grass of the fields knew, and the little woods, though they gave no sign. I could have stretched out my arms, craving to gather or be gathered by it all; but it would not; I was out of it, yet had been awfully near.

> Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is and secret;
> Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.

That chirp of Ariel I know in Nature and in art. It is going away from us always when we are aware of it, escaping out to the infinite on every side. We pursue a stumbling step or two with outstretched arms, foolishly, like children; feeling hunger as the ghost of an agony or a rapture—how can we tell?

Other art, when its moment comes, takes the wings of the morning. Beethoven alone of the very powerful ones—am I allowed to say?—takes the wings of the evening, Sappho's *ϝέσπερε πάντα φέρων*—'O Evening, gathering again all that the bright dawn scattered; gathering the sheep, gathering the goat, gathering the child to his mother.'

PART FOUR

I

I HAVE come to the end of the journey; that is to say, I stopped finding new gods and forsaking old ones. The path no longer kept opening up in front and closing in behind. But it did widen out. When I mentioned, a long way back, a characterization of two women by a man who had loved them both, namely, that the first had eclipsed all other women for him, whereas the second had seemed to gather up and represent womanhood, it was because the former case described so well my Chopin-passion. I could quote it again now because the latter case fits, just as exactly, my relation to Beethoven. Beethoven was not merely himself; he gathered up and represented music. I became very much more docile and broken in to music, so to speak, in his hands; not so much of an outlaw and a raider. With him for introducer and interpreter I moved about and made acquaintance with the best-known people without making an absolutely life-or-death demand on them. I still asked a great deal. I never got on what I might call bread-and-butter terms with music. First to last I don't suppose I ever have cared greatly merely for music as such, as the naturally musical person does, with an appetite for any wholesome fare. A fairly high threshold degree of interest has to be surpassed before I make the effort of attending. Yet, now I come to think of it, I behave in the same way towards poetry also.

Much music did come over the threshold. Of individual works I will name two; rather arbitrarily, it may seem, but they stand out in memory; the number of times I have played them both must run into hundreds, if not thousands.

Also, there may be many readers of this who have never discovered them. One is Schubert's Sonata in B flat, without opus number, published after his death. I referred to it, not by name, when speaking of music that could stand up to the touchstone of pain. I was thinking then of the first movement, which has breadth, calm and compassionate wisdom, altogether a spiritual maturity surprising in Schubert. The slow movement is most touchingly beautiful, but it is not for healing. That beauty, exhaling from slender substance, would be unbearable to real sorrow, unless for somebody clasping grief to his breast and dying to the world. Indeed, before the end, one may let the time drag among the fainting octave echoes, beneath and above, till not much more and the pulse of life itself would slow and stop.

The other piece is an Adagio of Mozart's, Köchel No. 21, in B minor. I took it for 'le bel *Adagio en si mineur*' which Romain Rolland in his novel makes Olivier play when Christophe wished to know through music the soul of his new-found friend. 'I should die,' Olivier had said when Christophe insisted. 'Well, that 's not a reason for a Frenchman.' Olivier, in the story, broke down at the close, and there is a heavenly-smiling little bit at the very end, where the music shifts into the major, which often pierced me through and through. The incident in the novel may read rather artificial to English taste, but I was grateful for the discovery which it led me in mere curiosity to make. And grateful also, let me say here, to whoever was responsible for having both it and the Schubert Sonata and many another work cut as music-rolls. There was some one of discernment and enthusiasm behind the choice of music cut for the old 65-note player-pianos. One has only to compare later catalogues, or lists of gramophone

records to-day, to realize that the departures from the obvious belong to the early days.

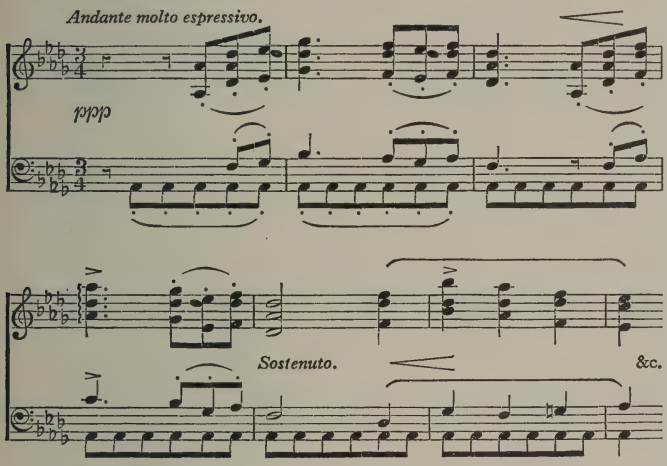
Formerly, it was all or nothing with a composer. Now I was content to make limited contacts, which yet enabled me to feel with one after another that I had grown to know him in some characteristic aspect. Schumann, with his intelligent friendliness on ordinary levels, and the leap of his spirit for the upper air, pure and near the sun. César Franck, whose driving-force, at once his strength and his weakness, seemed to be that very theatricality which his adoring disciple, Vincent d'Indy, thought he was too innocent and too good to possess. I preferred him frankly melodramatic, as in *Le Chasseur Maudit*. But it was his symphony which finally cured me by nausea of my lust for noise. Richard Strauss, a magnificent exploiter, yet capable of being twisted and seared, as in *Electra*, by the timeless strength and burning reality of what he handled. I suddenly remember *Carmen*. It ought to have been mentioned away back in the story. That was one thing that bit in when other operas couldn't make a mark. There's no denying *Carmen* at any stage of musical growth. One of its phrases,

long ago got into my mind-fabric, and continually reappears, and always will, in the carrier-tape of certain kinds of reflection and feeling.

2

One composer I must speak of more fully. I delved into Brahms with some of the old life-or-death fervour. If I

were to name one particular 'catching-on' work, as I have done in other cases, it would be the Sonata in F minor, Opus 5, more especially the *Andante*, most especially the long coda of that movement with its spell as immediately perceptible as if tranquil hands were laid upon the head of the listener:



There was, however, an earlier adventure which I shall refer to in a few moments.

I could never be quite single-hearted about Brahms. The doubts and reservations that usually appeared only on the ebb-tide were always there. Even when my appreciation was at its height I could feel puzzled, dissatisfied, ready to be antagonistic.

If we think of music, like poetry, as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', Brahms is hard to beat. Who so delicately, so strongly, so thoughtfully, can re-compose an impression, an aspect of nature in its glow or chill, its scents and shifting colour, or a human episode, evaluated and represented

to the finest shade of its identity? And of course all art-work must be 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. But the use of poetry is to get back farther than ordinary words into the heart of the original perception or action; and the use of music, to go beyond even poetry in this. Brahms's music never seems to me to get quite inside the thing in itself. It is always at one remove: it is always *about* the reality.

See it in the song, *Von ewiger Liebe*. The power of that song, I think, lies in a movement from circumference to centre. It develops from a quiet external view, grows and comes nearer, like a picture on the screen, till it is overwhelming and all about one, and oneself, as it were, at the centre of it all. A meditative eye passes over a scene on which night is closing down, noting a pair of figures, rustic lovers, part of such a scene, like the trees or the beasts in the fields. But they come near. That shadowy patch, representing the love of man and woman, emerges from the background, becomes lifesize. When the lad speaks, the drama is stepped-up to the heroic mould. Then, when the girl replies, the standing of a looker-on slides away from us; we feel, as in a dream, the blinding sweetness of protective love that stirs in her, a singing force that, once awakened, goes spurning and soaring up in triumph over the world and time. That seems to me to be the intention of the song. Brahms must have felt hot and shivery while he wrote it. And, with any help from the singer, I gladly yield myself to it and feel hot and shivery with him. Yet I can't honestly say that I think the music does go the whole way and become the thing in itself. The theme is exactly the theme of the *Liebestod* at the end of *Tristan*. And it was a far better conception to find it in a milkmaid any evening, and reveal the voice

universal there, than to put it on the lips of a dying queen once on a time centuries ago. But for me, at any rate, there is very definitely the difference that Wagner's music is right inside the heart of the thing, and Brahms's is still the idea of it, his own strong, noble, true idea, but only that, though the whole movement of the song, from circumference to centre, might, here if anywhere, have carried him for once over the invisible line.

When I was first making acquaintance with Brahms his music used to strike me as rather self-conscious, enough to make a listener faintly uncomfortable himself, just as in real life. Later, the impression gets washed out and would seem paltry if recalled amid the nobility of his intercourse. But the quality is still there; part of the style which is the man. One catches sight of it again standing back and comparing him with Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, or lesser musicians. An artist, like a mother, should have some fundamental faith, sublime or fatuous, which never questions his offspring's right to exist. A shortage of this faith makes it impossible for the creator to forget himself and keep himself out of his work. It is injurious to the obstetrics by which things great or small are born into the world with the attribute of inevitability. Brahms's chicks, even his great eagles, have bits of egg-shell still adhering to them. It must be significant that no song or strain of his has made itself at home in the ears and on the lips of common folk.

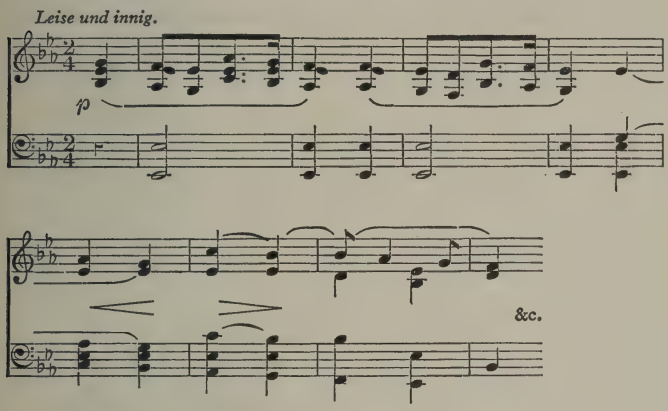
I have had the idea that Brahms came nearest to losing himself, and so finding himself, in music linked up with the thought of Robert Schumann, particularly his two implicitly elegiac works, the D minor Concerto and the Pianoforte-Duet Variations on a theme of Schumann's, Opus 23. With the Concerto I had a sort of 'Lost Chord'

experience. The opening of it was the first music of Brahms that ever caught my attention, perhaps the first I ever heard; but I did not know till long after whose it was. I was roll-hunting once at the Aeolian Hall when from some closed studio a player-piano burst out with what startled me like a human cry. The music ran on for a minute or two, 'what passion, hark, what pain!'[1], and stopped suddenly. I had not the courage to go at once and ask what the thing was. I could not remember the notes afterwards well enough to get any one to identify it for me, even if I'd had a friend who knew it, and the D minor was rarely played in those days. I knew it was orchestral; I guessed Tchaikovsky, dubiously, and was sure anyhow it was Russian. There was only a limited number of possibles in the Roll catalogues; I worked through them and sought in other ways but never found it till two or three years later when I had begun to explore Brahms. How I jumped when the perforations on a new thick roll reached the tracker-bar and abruptly there came forth that unforgotten cry of grief and horror! That, at least, is direct enough. Nobody could get much closer to the thing in itself. When I first heard it, behind closed doors, Schumann's attempt at suicide might have just been told. In the central movement Brahms is back again at his most characteristic, and please don't think for a moment that I'd have it different. It is wonderfully exalted and serene music, also associated, we are told, with Schumann, and inscribed, 'Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini'.

The four-handed set of variations is written on the little tune which Schumann said had been sung to him by the spirit of Schubert in those latter days when his mind was

[1] It's annoying to have just remembered Matthew Arnold wrote, 'What triumph, hark, what pain!'

dark and disordered and he was tormented by devil-voices. The fact that Schumann craved for and seemed to catch these few quintessential drops of pity and love and peace gives us a moving thought of his extremity:



I think Brahms is to be honoured that no fear of presumption or exaggerated Teutonic sentiment of reverence could hold back the deep tide of his friendship from catching up this pathetic fragment and bearing it out to sea with gentleness, with exaltation, with solemn mystery, with tossing triumph. He would be only half a man who could judge and assess these variations merely musically. They are so surely Brahms's attempt to utter his heart's deepest feeling.

If the thought of Schumann partly breaks down his guard it is not easy at other times and places to get within arm's length of Brahms. One can come to know his language and idiom very well without feeling any real intimacy with himself. He can make exquisitely gentle songs, lovely transparencies, outpourings of virile energy, four-square structures that tower up through modulations,

block stepped on block, as incredible as New York sky-scrapers. If we speak of these things we find it difficult to make any reservation. Yet, somehow, the man behind them remains intangible, and does not strongly draw to himself thoughts of affection and reverence. Beethoven once said that he could kneel by Handel's grave. Every music-lover will recognize that kind of response, and has felt it himself towards Mozart or Bach or Beethoven or Schubert. In homage and love one reaches out to the personality behind the music. He has delivered himself to us in the most eloquent, the most intimate, the most revealing of all languages; there is something between us, something that goes back from us to him; we revere him, we know him so well, we hold him so dear. But it is not easy to feel in that way about Brahms.

Perhaps it is just that the figure of himself comes athwart the vision—short, phlegmatic, dumped on the music-stool with a huge overhang of his posterior person. A prodigy that he should be at the source of such pure and holy strains—surprising, yet accordant with the experience of a fat and whiskered man surprising us by sketching out a tune in a fluty tenor like an angel's. The portraits of most composers, I should say, match very faithfully one's notion of their musical selves. Wagner, Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann—when you have seen their likeness you feel you could almost have drawn it. Is the same rather tragically true of Brahms?

Here and there are traits in Brahms I do not like. There is sometimes a morbid streak of a peculiar ghostly sort; snaky little tunes, which, in their fastidiousness and intellectualism are all the more repellent. But that is not my stumbling-block. What holds me up is not what Brahms gives away, but what he does not give away; not that at his

worst he can be repellent, but that at his best he remains enigmatic. Rarely a sudden blaze does come, startling one like receiving full in the eyes the beam of a searchlight. There is one at the end of the B flat Piano Concerto. There is another, at a potential several thousand volts greater, in the introduction to the Finale of the C minor Symphony. But this rare directness (most likely to appear, for some reason, at the end of a movement or a work) is just enough to prove it is not his habit to let himself go, and to make very obvious the ambiguity that guards his art as a whole.

3

I never got to Bach, though many prophets have told me I should end there. I have been transported by the pure loveliness of voices and strings in solemn echoey places. My reception of the slow movement of the E major Violin Concerto gave a friend hopes of me. But on these occasions the quality of medium and setting was such as would have made any clean music sound celestial. I could not take these things away and digest them all alone at the piano. The 'Forty-Eight' bored me when I pegged in at them for a while myself, and only gave me a vague absent-minded sort of pleasure when played by some one obviously intent and loving every note of them. Odd things I did enjoy would, I suspect, damn me even more. There was the dramatic D minor Toccata and Fugue. And there was a programme piece, *Capriccio on the Departure of a Brother*, which seemed to me to have a lot of style about it, essentials of feeling and fun. It made one conscious, as an old woodcut might do, of a clever, firm hand owned by a man of heart with a humorous eye. But I believe it is doubted now whether that hand belonged to J. S. B.

Probably an outsider reaches his limits here. It takes a musician, natural or made, to worship Bach in sincerity and truth. My difficulty was to keep listening. I had little sense of the musical development when a contrapuntal piece was running its course. And the feeling-content, rapturous or whatever it might be, was too static, as a rule, to keep the music in my focus of consciousness. Movements that started straight in on the level of feeling which they maintained to the end, with *pianos* or *fortes* introduced according to the fancy at the moment of the performer, quickly became a background for wandering thoughts. It was music that did not seem to need one, not when it was made—it might have been written in a life-long hermit's cell—and not when performed. I should have been almost afraid of committing the 'pathetic fallacy' in claiming kinship with its moods, as when one speaks of 'dancing waters', or sees sullenness in a heavy swell, or blandness where 'the Indian Ocean sits and smiles'. I hardly felt it as made by art, much less with that occasional artifice which, Ernest Newman once said, makes cronies crowd round the keyboard and cry to one another delightedly, 'The old scoundrel'. (Yet surely there would be no cause for affectionate glee except in detecting the hand of man in what would *almost* pass for a work of Nature.)

Every word I write, of course, reveals how completely outside I was and am. Probably the people who love Bach love him for things I don't know anything about. So please now understand I am only explaining things to myself, from my own external standpoint, when I say that the qualities which keep me off are just the ones likely to be valued by those who have a lot to do with music, perhaps too much, and especially by composers. They may well refresh and renew themselves, not on one another's peaks,

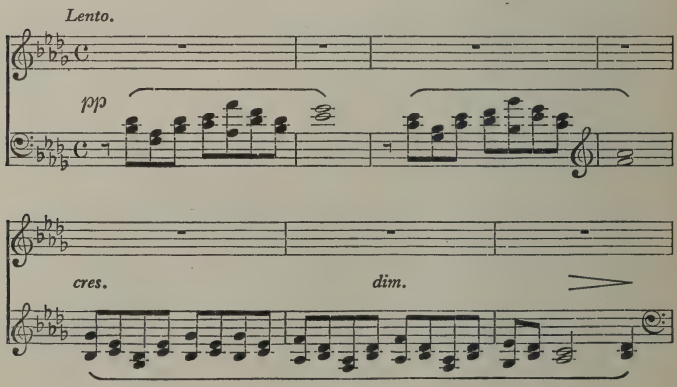
but at ocean-level, in music that is unwearying like the sea, and has neither illusions nor self-doubts. It is understandable also that one might not only bathe in it for vital renewal, but subside in it at last, letting everything else go. I can see that, and yet feel it does not apply to me, because music is not so bred in my bone that I must have it to live. When music ceases to be in some sense for me a struggle or a search I imagine it just drops out of my life. But for really musical people it is understandable that Bach should remain when Beethoven goes. It seems, indeed, to be a fact, and it looks a very impressive one. No test, surely, can be sounder than the wearing-test. Yet we must not let it be too impressive. It may be the man who is worn more than the music. When the temperature drops cold-blooded creatures can survive, and creatures, too, who acquired their warm-blood by climbing out and up on the high land, and then returned to the first element, like seals, and the great whales also. After all, you only have to push the wearing-test far enough to leave nothing human. We are bound to beware of a test that fails the flower and passes the stone, and would make the old folk's wisdom truer than the insight of a poet in love or a young mother with her first baby.

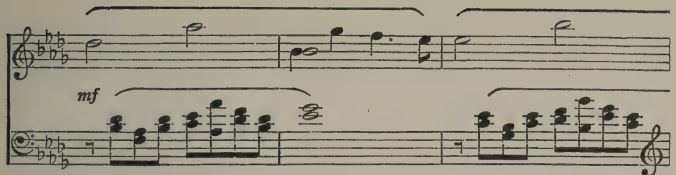
This is a defensive explanation I make to myself in face of any evidence that the curve of my pilgrimage ends in Bach. It is probably all off the mark, as I have already said. The flower and the poet and the young mother are in Bach, doubtless, with everything else; and blessed are they who find them there. But I don't happen to be one of them; and merely that he should remain at the last, as the spires will fall, and the mountains crumble down to ocean-level (which I *can* understand), doesn't impress me as in itself a claim to paramount worth.

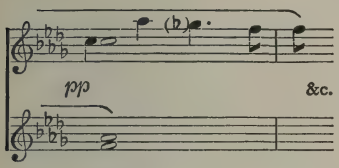
4

Modern music, meaning music that consciously makes a break with the past, has never taken hold of me. Perhaps I have never gone far to meet it. From time to time I have 'given it a chance', as I would probably say to myself, but the phrase almost implies some of the lumpish inertia that stones, or at any rate stone-walls, the prophets. I know it is not enough to stand still and offer oneself to be taken if anybody can; one has to be eagerly and hopefully receptive and go half-way to meet a new power in art to have a chance of recognizing it and being captivated by it if it happens to be real.

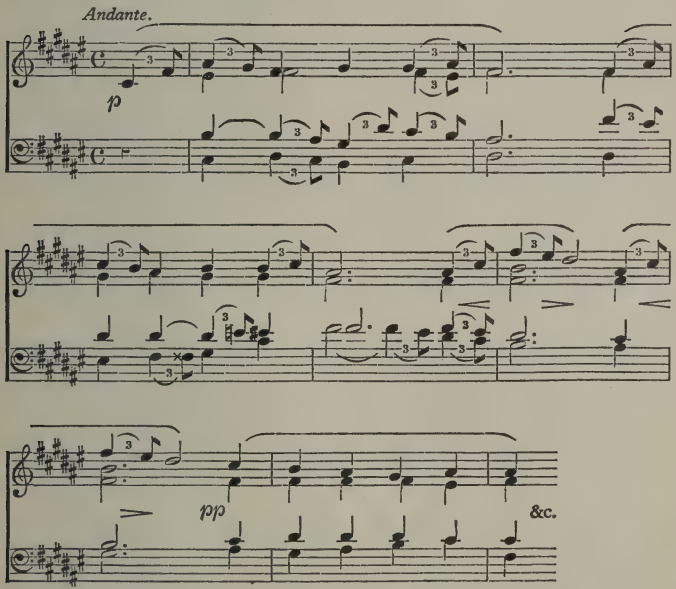
There was a time when I hearkened close to Scriabin, and had an inkling that large developments might lie ahead in that quarter. There were some strands in his music that came about me like the first tendrils of what should be a great attachment. There was, for example, a sort of sweetness, boy-angelic, very gentle yet ardent. It was to be found once or twice in his early work, a lovely and unique note to hear among his imitations of Chopin or Brahms. There was the tiny Prelude, No. 15 in Opus 11:







There was the tune used as the theme of the slow movement in his Piano Concerto, a tune said to have been written when he was a small child:



I hope no one will say 'sugary', because to me they tasted like drops of nectar of a brand nobody else has distilled.

Again and again I caught faint flavours of this strain in his later work. One or two other self-revealing ways of his became recognizable, and, without being able to grasp or care very much for any single work of size, I felt I was on the trail. Out of just such few and slight clues knowledge and love of a new voice and of the heart behind it had grown before. But not in this case. I failed in following up the clues. Or else they led nowhere. Scriabin never showed up through the fog. He seems to be dropping into oblivion to-day. But I am not sure about him even now.

Scriabin, however, hardly counts as modern. He certainly belongs spiritually to the old culture, and I have not been able to get myself into an on-coming disposition towards any of those who stand for the new. The attitude is not as facile for me to assume as it is for people who have never cared very much for anything in older music. On the other hand, as I have already said, I am not the born musician who, having exhausted known possibilities, follows perforce pioneers who have turned the back on them, since music is his meat and drink. I, too, may get weary sometimes of expressiveness, and of the deep questionings about life and its meaning which underlie all the greatest music of the last 150 years. But when that happens I let go of music. I don't need to have it around me like a patterned wall-paper instead of pictures. And I don't seek compensation by reverting to the primitive, either the archaic or the negroid.

5

Those who would have liked to see my personal discoveries move on from glory to glory must remember not

to expect too much of one not musical either by endowment or training. The astronomer, from three separate observations, can calculate the whole future course of some wandering little body, and I have had letters from people kind enough to be interested assuring me that I was following a well-marked track, and telling me how it went on. But my curve breaks off where logically, perhaps, it should continue. From my point of view any continuation looks like a decline, either to more limited music or to partially disintegrated music. As a wandering comet in outer space I got up speed by a chance approach to Chopin, was whirled round Wagner, and finally captured by Beethoven. My orbit widened out, and may go on widening, but I think there is no chance of a real shift in the centre of gravity, still less of my breaking away and beginning to revolve round some new sun.

The story of my pilgrimage is just the story of my discovery of Beethoven. It might be as far from the truth as it usually is to let it be understood that I lived happy ever after. I let slip just now a remark about being sometimes tired of music. That seems an awful admission to make. I could throw the blame in various directions.

It may be, for example, a mistake to write a book about music. Blake said, 'Never seek to tell thy love'. When you write experience out do you in some degree write it out of yourself? Without meaning to, one may be saying 'Good-bye to all that', as Robert Graves lately did purposefully: 'Once all this has been settled in my mind and written down and published it need never be thought about again.' Perhaps when a poet has released in a sonnet his adoration of his lady and his anguished longing he can eat and sleep and do without her.

Or I might blame broadcasting and gramophones.

There is too much music; it is too accessible, and too good, a great deal of it. One has no chance to raise a thirst. When I first took the trail I had to wait for months often to hear or hear again some particular work. By the time the occasion came I was at fever-heat and could hardly sit on my seat. Later, with a player-piano, I could get most things I wanted, and practically everything I particularly wanted, but I had to do my bit; I had to reach out and join hands with the composer to give some kind of body to his thought. I had a share in it. So much the worse for the music, naturally; but so much the better for me. I was in rooms most of the time, rather lonely. There was not the distraction of other people and mass-feeling about me, as in a concert-hall or even a drawing-room; there was not the personality and excellent skill of a performer to be admired; and there were none of the keyboard difficulties I should have had if I had been an ordinary pianist, nor his pleasure in mere dexterity. There was only the stuff of the music itself to concentrate on, and that called out one's utmost capacity to understand and respond and co-operate. In such conditions nobody could have helped getting possession of some of the music's content. If I got more than the average man it was not by reason of any good taste, except in the sense of that twist given to the phrase which I have already quoted, 'Good taste is gusto'. That is to say, you have good taste by having a lot of it, rather than by having it subtle and fastidious; it is a statement of quantity, just as 'good sight' or 'good hearing' is, before it is a description of quality.

But nowadays music is literally on tap. There is no drought to give desire and anticipation a chance to work up pressure. The music-lover is discouraged from any efforts of his own. It would be fatuous for him to insist

on rough-hewing himself things that can be had straight from the hands of fine artists. For the sake of his own manual ability he might do it, hardly for the sake of the music. He has no part but to sit still and listen. Being asked only for passive receptivity, it is exceedingly likely that he soon stops giving even that. Abundance is always deadlier to the spirit than privation. I keep wondering how potential music-pilgrims of the youthful generation are going to seek and have adventures and make discoveries with the ether itself full of music, a background noise which matters so little for some that they do not need to silence it to read or write or think. It is not only an external problem; it is my own personal one. What is one to do with such a wealth of music? I think of ravishing experiences: how I have closed my eyes voluptuously when the symphonic song broadened and came rolling in a tawny swathe from innumerable strings; how I have felt as if I needed to be physically untwisted inside after some exquisite fragility of Chopin or Mozart; how the sublimation of the slow movement in a great sonata has left me limp as though I had been beaten with rods. But what is to be done when such transports are available almost daily? It looks like a foretaste of heaven (except that my account of these throes may look more like Purgatory). Well, 'the spirits that surround the throne may bear the burning bliss', but I can't. I have either to withhold myself from such experiences, or something in me is going to be deadened. In practice, partly I do the one, partly I suffer the other.

Or again, a confession of feeling tired at times of the greatest things in music might be seized on as more than a private phenomenon by someone seeking evidence of a change said to be in process on a scale as wide as the world. If the water runs out of one little hole or ditch it is possible

the same thing is happening in others all over the place, showing that some great tide is ebbing. Perhaps the culture to which we belong (who write and read a book like this) has run its course and is dying out in mankind, and a new one is being born around us, or even encroaching within. One that does not attend to our prophets, not because it has other prophets of its own, but because a young culture, like the young of man, is not concerned with the fundamental questions which have been the common driving-force of our greatest painting, poetry, religion, philosophy, music, especially German music, in these last centuries. At its own time, in some new age, it will come face to face with the ultimate questions, as every successive culture has done, and in its own way will wrestle with them. But in the meantime they are side-tracked as unprofitable and uninteresting compared with what is concrete, direct, technical, the material body of the world and the vital body of man. Without any language of its own in music, it can accept jazz, which at least is primitive enough to be completely non-prophetic.

This theory has been expounded and maintained by certain German writers who certainly can present the facts in a very impressive way. Of course, it is much easier than it looks to make large generalizations and arrange the facts in them. And there is always the tendency to interpret the passing mood of a generation or a decade as a great secular change.

6

I hesitated about the foregoing section, but wrote it because I have treated this book all through as a place to be truthful in. The reason for hesitating was lest I might weaken the testimony of earlier pages. Any admissions

I make are about myself, my shallowness, my flagging. I am as far as can be from wanting to modify or retract anything I have written about music, especially one man's music. Rather, when I read back, I often wish I could square or cube a statement as easily as the mathematician does by writing a little ^{2} or ^{3} after it. If at times now I let music alone it is as one would let alone a sleeping dog, or lion. During such a spell a phrase from one of the great things accidentally overheard will 'shiver through', awfully potent because of all it has been, and is, and still may be. I may weaken; not they.

I am speaking about Beethoven, of course. This is a book about him. That has become always clearer as I wrote, and it has been difficult to give adequate historical proportion to other stages of the pilgrimage. Superficial in knowledge and supercilious in criticism and whatever else I may be, the feel of Beethoven is something which subdues me altogether. I remember with a grin Samuel Butler's Miss Skinner[1] and her 'For me a simple chord of Beethoven is enough', and how it got mixed up in fantasy with her portentous father waiting for supper, 'Nothing—nothing whatever. . . . Stay—I may presently take a glass of cold water and a small piece of bread and butter', and came out in epitaph-like shape:

Stay:
I may presently take
A simple chord of Beethoven
Or a small semiquaver
From one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words.

But not even the fear of qualifying for the Skinner family-tomb, with that monument to humbug over it, deters me from standing alongside Miss Skinner.

[1] *The Way of All Flesh.*

By some accident in time, or some orchestration of destiny, Beethoven's place came at the very crest of music. His work weights and shapes the summit of the wave's towering, before it spouted and burst. He is one of two or three figures who stand in a symbolic and representative relation to their art, as, for example, Shakespeare in words, or Michelangelo in stone. More than any of these he stands for me in a symbolic and representative relation to man's nature and life. The human lot; human will and human vision; the plain staple of life, nine-tenths of the whole, compact of divers good strong threads; the bright splendours too, no less real, not tinsel; the mystery around it all; the hunger of the spirit; the intimacy and loving-kindness.

He has the supremacy of one who sees farther into every part because he clasps together the whole. His feet are on the earth as solid as a peasant's, yet he can outsoar the visionary.

He has the supremacy of one who utters the common truth with unique inevitability. His great words are nearly all elementally simple, musically and spiritually.

I think it is his growth most of all that makes me see him as the master-type. Open any volume of his you like, say the piano-sonatas: you turn over the pages, and you first pause, perhaps, at the 'D Major' and the *Pathétique*; later on at the *Moonlight*, the 'D Minor', the *Appassionata*; last of all at Opus 106, Opus 110, Opus 111. Or think of the Symphonies: first the Third, *then* the Fifth, *then* the Seventh, *then* the Ninth. Periodically the big wave comes, as when you are watching from the shore. But more than that. All the time also the tide is coming in, the sea itself is growing greater.

It is not mere growing in bulk and stature. If that were

all it might have come to seem as nothing. For there is the question which at some point lay in wait for Beethoven, as for every artist: 'What does it all come to, this art of mine, these symphonies, this splendour of sound?' Is there any help for him when he stares at the answer: 'Sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal?'

We can imagine Shakespeare and Michelangelo at that issue. We do not need to imagine. They have told us. As everybody knows, we have Shakespeare's own words in his last play. Prospero lays down his powers, not in death. It is impossible that the interpretation which comes irresistibly into our minds was not present in Shakespeare's own. The sadness spreads from him to us, of his art, an 'insubstantial pageant', and no comfort that the cloud-capped towers and the great globe itself are little more enduring, and ourselves such stuff as dreams are made on. Then those lines, so lovely and wistful, beginning:

> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
> And ye that on the sands with printless feet . . .

Ending,

> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.

There is a sonnet, written by Michelangelo, which shows him turning away from his art to find God and reality:

> Here ends love's tender fantasy that made
> (I know the error of the thought) great art
> My idol and my monarch; now my heart
> Perceives how low is each man's longing laid.
> Painting and sculpture now are no more gain
> To still the soul . . . [1]

[1] Mrs. Oliphant's translation.

It seems to be just the very great ones who come to an end in their art, who take the full force of some ultimate question that reduces their glorious achievement to shadows, and leaves no more hope of a substance still to be attained.

But when Beethoven came into the pressure of that last issue he was driven inward. He searched himself and music. He reached, in his own way, the truth that burst out of Paul on the level of inspired song: *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.* He broke through to that which delivers from the sense of futility all humble or great self-fulfilment in art and life.

So there is no sort of farewell to art in Beethoven, as there is in Shakespeare and Michelangelo. When we listen to Opus 110, or the *Arietta* of Opus 111, or the *Sacred Song of Thanksgiving* in Opus 132, we understand why not.

It would be hardly possible for any one to miss this truth about Beethoven as against the lordly ones I have set beside him. But it might easily be doubted whether the love and joy he attained are a unique quality, or even one very rare in art. Perhaps Raphael or Mozart might be mentioned, perhaps far lesser names. But there is this to be thought of, that makes all the difference to its nature and worth. It is part of a great whole in Beethoven. The strength of the tree it grows on is transmuted into it.

I believe the essential point is that Beethoven broke through to it at the end. It matters whether a red sky comes in the morning or at evening, though it may look the same. There may be, indeed there surely are, singers whose voices from the start have been full of tenderness and joy. It is not likely to be the sign of the greatest kind of artist. A red sky at morning more often foretells a weak

and watery art of the sentimental sort. Beethoven was not an early prodigy of brilliance or sweetness. His morning sky was sober. The light grew steadily, the plain widening daylight, with the sun itself climbing the heavens, letting loose more and more the direct blaze of its power through the noon and afternoon. Then, when the evening came, there was to be found that magic softness, strange yet intimate, and rosy scraps of cloud floating far up the sky—the token of a noble day of life, and a sign of promise under which the sun can go down and leave us not with any sense of futility or dismay, as if night had the last word, and all human art and human life were only sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

I am afraid I am terribly apt to try to be eloquent, not being a good writer. I hope that will not hinder anyone from seeing what I truly mean when I call Beethoven my master-type, and understanding why he remains the goal of my musical pilgrimage.

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